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OPENhouse



Issue No.8

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No hope for borrowing on council housing repairs



Resource centre opens for business

■ The Council's Community Consultation Team gets ready to welcome residents to the brand new Wyn Garret Tenant Resource Centre. The centre, in Raynham House, Massingham Street, E1, has a wide range of facilities for residents. For full story see page 3.

Government plans for councils will not help Tower Hamlets

The Government has published its draft Local Government Bill – dashing hopes that councils like Tower Hamlets will be allowed to borrow enough money to improve their homes.

Launching the bill, the Deputy Prime Minister's office said that it paved the way for substantial new freedoms for councils to help them improve services and make real difference to the quality of life of their communities.

WAY FORWARD FOR TOWER HAMLETS

However, the Bill confirms the approach that the Council is taking through Housing Choice is the

only practical way forward for Tower Hamlets.

Housing experts have been quick to point out that the rules as set out in the Bill will not allow metropolitan councils with large debts to raise enough money to provide an alternative to stock transfer.

£590m NEEDED

Regular readers of Openhouse will be aware that the Council needs to spend £590 million over the next five years to bring its housing up to a decent standard. But the most it can hope to raise from rents and government subsidies is £300 million – leaving a shortfall of £290 million.

Cllr David Edgar,

Lead Councillor for Housing said: "It is clear from the new Bill that rents and government subsidies are going to remain the only money available to Tower Hamlets to spend on housing. But the amount we will get simply is not going to be enough to bring our housing up to scratch.

"We will therefore continue to work with residents to look at alternative ways to bring in the money we need through Housing Choice."

Copies of the draft Bill can be read at the Wyn Garrett Tenant Resource Centre, Massingham St, E1 (see page 3) or on www.odpm.gov.uk

Editorial

Welcome to Issue 8

Our front page story is about the recently published Local Government Bill, which has put an end to hopes that the Government might be about to relax the rules on council borrowing in a way that will help Tower Hamlets raise more money.

As Cllr David Edgar, Lead Councillor for Housing says, it is clear the Tower Hamlets is not going to be able to borrow enough money to improve our housing.

This is why the Council is holding the Housing Choice consultation, to look at alternative ways of bringing much-needed investment to estates.

In this issue, you can read about eight of the registered social landlords who have been invited by the Borough-wide Compact Group to take part in Stage 2. Details of the remaining eight landlords were included in the last issue.

We also have details about proposals to set up EastEndHomes, a new Council-sponsored community landlord. Estates will be able to choose to work with this or one of the other social landlords on the list to work up plans for their estate.

It is essential that residents get genuinely independent advice during Stage 2. On page 4 you can read about PPCR, whom the Borough-wide Compact Group has selected to act as independent advisors.

Don't forget – we are keen to hear your views and questions. Write to: Openhouse, c/o Consultation and Participation Team, 20 Three Colt Street, Limehouse, London E14 8HJ

The 16 Housing Choice RSLs are:

- Bethnal Green & Victoria Park Housing Association.
- Circle 33 Housing Trust
- Grand Union Housing Co-Operative
- Guinness Trust Group
- LABO Housing Association
- Mitali Housing Association
- Old Ford Housing Association
- Peabody Trust
- Poplar HARCA
- Solon Co-Operative Housing Services
- Southern Housing Group
- Spitalfields H.A.
- Swan Housing Association
- Tower Hamlets Community Housing
- Toynbee Housing Association
- William Sutton Trust

Plus the new Council-sponsored landlord EastEndHomes (see page 3)

Introducing the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)

The Borough-wide Compact Group has selected 16 RSLs to take part in Stage 2 of Housing Choice. In choosing the 16 the Borough-wide Compact Group used a set of criteria, including residents' concerns over local service delivery and experience of managing both tenants' and leaseholders' properties.

The full list of the selected registered social landlords is given below left. Last month, Openhouse asked eight of them to outline their reasons for wanting to take part. Here, the remaining eight give their views.

CIRCLE 33 HOUSING TRUST

Lead Officer: Howard Hughes – Director of Business Development.
Contact Address:
P.O. Box 19080,
London N7 9ZE.

"Circle Thirty Three has extensive experience of working in Tower Hamlets.

"We believe that our focus on providing first class services to our customers and our commitment to housing regeneration make us an ideal partner for resident groups interested in investigating the Housing Choice option developed by the Council."



SOUTHERN HOUSING GROUP

Lead Officer: Martina Kennedy – Senior New Initiatives Officer
Contact Address:
Fleet House,
59-61 Clerkenwell Road,
London EC1M 5LA

"We have managed homes in Tower Hamlets for over 30 years. The knowledge and experience we have gained managing almost 1500 homes in the borough has given us a good understanding of issues that are important to residents and how to deliver appropriate services. We believe that building on that experience will benefit our existing residents and residents transferring to the group."



SWAN HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Lead Officer: Geoff Pearce – Head of Development Services (London)
Contact Address:
Cygnet House South
10 Chrisp Street
Poplar
London E14 6LL

"Housing Choice will enable Swan to meet our objectives of providing high quality affordable homes, helping communities grow and prosper and always putting the needs of our tenants first. We have a new office in Chrisp Street and will soon have over 650 new homes in Tower Hamlets, which we now regard as one of our core areas."



GRAND UNION HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE

Lead Officer: Nancy Hunt
Contact Address:
103b Bishops Way
London E2 9HL

"The co-operative feels that it is important that tenants in Tower Hamlets be offered the option of genuine and full tenant control, in the form of a housing co-opera-



tive.

Participating in Housing Choice would also fulfil one of the co-operative's key objectives, which is to increase its current size."

THE GUINNESS TRUST

Lead Officer: Martin Lippitt – Regional Development Manager
Contact Address:
5 The Office Village,
4 Romford Road,
Stratford,
London E15 4EA.

"We have extensive experience of regenerating homes and communities. We firmly believe that residents must be at the heart of successful regeneration and schemes should only be undertaken if this happens. Housing Choice mirrors this approach and as a Housing Choice landlord we are sure we can make a difference"



SOLON CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING SERVICES

Lead Officer: Raymond Little – Director of Services
Contact Address:
148 Cambridge Heath Road,
London E1 5QJ

"We are dedicated to promoting tenant choice, have 25 years experience working with the local community, have substantial resources available to invest in improvements to homes and services (Group borrowing of £227 million available) and want to involve and empower tenants in decisions which affect their homes and lives."



MITALI HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Lead Officer: Jamal Uddin – Residents Services Manager
Contact Address:
148 Cambridge Heath Road,
London E1 5QJ

"Mitali:

- was set up and managed by local people from Sylhet living in Tower Hamlets
- has developed many quality family homes since 1984
- will use our good services to tenants, low rents, financial strength, membership of the Network Group and local knowledge to improve housing conditions in Wapping, Stepney and Bethnal Green."



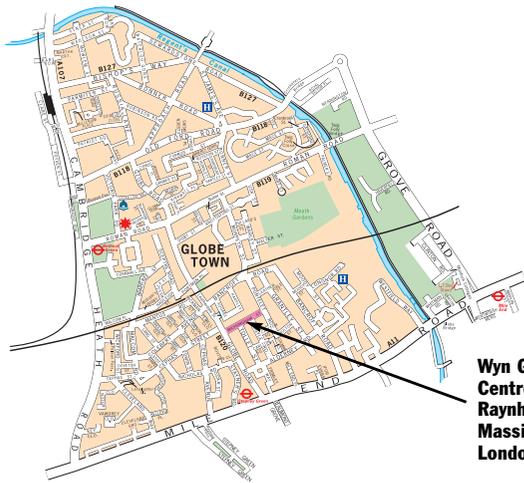
WILLIAM SUTTON TRUST

Lead Officer: Paul Eastwood – Housing Director (South)
Contact Address:
Two Waters House
Lawn Lane
Hemel Hempstead
Herts HP3 9WH

"William Sutton Trust offers:

- experience (founded 1900; in Bethnal Green since 1909)
- size and strength (16,000 homes)
- local Management
- charitable status and 'Chartermark' performance
- major repairs expertise (£12 million annual spend)
- community investment of £600,000 pa
- alliance with Ujima HA, England's most successful black-led RSL."





Wyn Garrett Resource Centre, Raynham House, Massingham Street, London E1

Resource centre opens

Tenants in Tower Hamlets have a new meeting place, training centre and information provider in the Wyn Garrett Resource Centre.

Located in Raynham House, Massingham Street, E1, the centre has been set up with money from the Council and the European Social Fund. Tenants can take advantage of:

- a meeting room
- computer suite
- a library with newspapers, magazines and information to help people searching for jobs.

People will be able to book use of the

computers, and project co-ordinator Justina Tulloch is busy setting up training sessions in IT skills such as word processing, desktop publishing, and computer graphics. As Justina says: "You name it – whatever is out there, people can learn to use."

People attending training will be offered expenses towards childcare costs and help towards their travel costs," says Justina. "So there's no excuse for not coming!"

The courses should be available from August.

Contact Justina on 020 7364 7540 for more information.

New community landlord takes shape

Plans for a new, Council-sponsored, not-for-profit community landlord – outlined in the last issue of Openhouse – are taking shape. The Boroughwide Compact Group agreed a working name – EastEndHomes – for the new landlord at their last meeting.

So what would the new organisation look like? Paul Bloss, Assistant Director of Housing, explains: "The main focus would be on local priorities – what local

people want for their homes and estates."

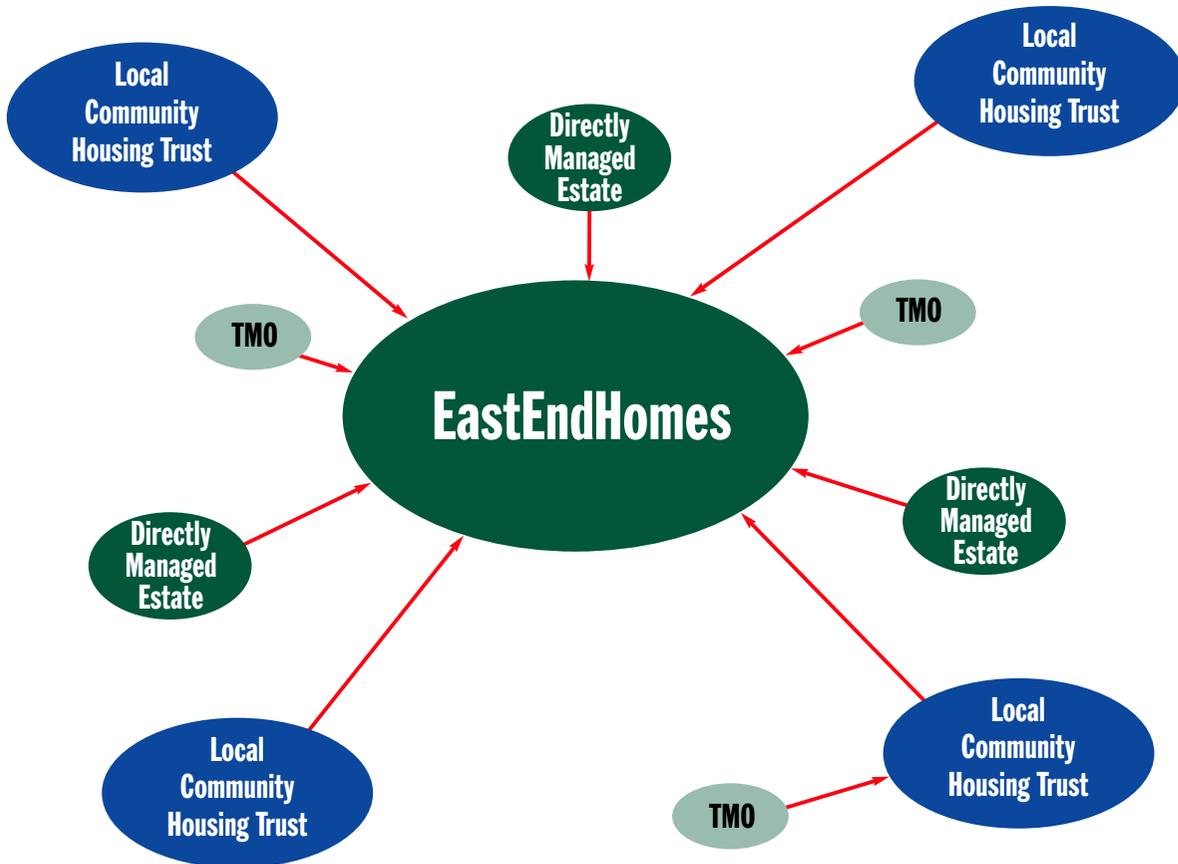
The organisation would therefore have a group structure – a single, borough-wide organisation – but allowing for a great deal of independence for individual estates.

EastEndHomes would be community led. Residents would have a significant number of places on the main board of directors and a majority on the local boards, if this is what individual estates choose.

The whole structure of the organisation will be

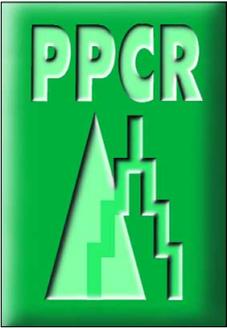
designed to give local people genuine control over the way their estates are managed. Residents from each estate that opts to work with EastEndHomes will be able to choose how much local involvement and responsibility for the management of their homes that they wish to take on.

"The organisation would be completely accountable to residents, and they would have real control over the services they receive," explains Paul Bloss.



TMOs discuss Housing Choice plans

Representatives from most of the borough's Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) attended a presentation on Stage 2 of Housing Choice recently. The meeting was a chance for people to find out details of Stage 2 and to raise questions and concerns specifically relevant to TMOs. The Council made clear that whatever happened with Housing Choice, there will still be a role for TMOs. Even if estates choose to transfer to a different social landlord, TMOs will still be able to work with them in the same way that they work with the Council at the moment. Each TMO is currently considering what position to take. Residents who are managed by a TMO should contact their own TMO for details.



Don't be pressured on Right-to-Buy

Don't fall for the hard sell on Right-to-Buy – that's the warning from Tower Hamlets.

The Council is concerned that tenants thinking about exercising their Right-to-Buy get proper advice.

Private companies and individuals are known to advertise their services, including financial assistance, in various ways, including putting leaflets through tenants' doors.

Those acting in this way may not give the best advice to people thinking about buying their home from the Council.

They may only point out the advantages while ignoring all the responsibilities that will come with home ownership such as payment of annual service charges and contributions towards future repairs and improvements.

Sue Benjamins, Corporate Director, Housing said: "Some companies tell people that the Right-to-Buy scheme is about to change or even come to an end. This is simply not true. The Government has been very clear that it has no intention of making any major changes to the scheme."

"Before taking any advice tenants should ask what the company stands to get from it. You may find that services you are being asked to apply for are available from the Council free of charge."

If you feel pressured by a company or individual, or simply need advice on Right-to-Buy, contact the Council on 020 7364 5000.

Residents keep PPCR on board for independent Housing Choice advice

The Borough-wide Compact Group has asked PPCR (Public Participation Consultation and Research) to act as independent residents' advisor during Stage 2 of the Housing Choice Consultation.

PPCR bring a wealth of experience to the role, having acted as independent advisor during Stage 1. Set up in 1989, the organisation has worked with many council tenants and residents – including Tower Hamlets' residents – to help them have a greater say in the management and control of their homes.

Openhouse asked PPCR's Ron Houston how PPCR will be helping residents during the coming months.

Openhouse: What does the role of independent residents' advisor involve?

Ron Houston: Our main aim is to offer advice and support to residents – whether individually or in the estate steering groups.

There are many important tasks

to be undertaken as part of Stage 2. Some of these are:

- helping break down the jargon;
- making sure that residents and representatives are fully informed and stay in control
- providing the right training, advice and support
- helping representatives work as a team
- helping representatives to 'get the best deal'
- working for residents to achieve success and improvements in housing stock and services.

We'll meet with individual residents and with the Borough-wide Compact Group, Estate Steering Groups, tenant and resident associations and informal groups to discuss and advise on key issues relating to Housing Choice and the selection of a registered social landlord partner.

Some of the issues in Housing Choice are detailed and complex. We see part of our role as providing support in understanding what these mean for residents, as

well as enabling them to analyse what it means for them, their families, their homes and their estates.

OH: How will you ensure that you get the views of residents?

PPCR: The key to effective resident participation and involvement in Housing Choice lies in information and consultation with all interested parties being carried out so that everyone understands the detail of written information and that everyone has a genuine opportunity to make their views known.

OH: How can you reassure residents that you are genuinely independent?

PPCR: We see ourselves working for the Borough-wide Compact Group, so anything we do will be discussed with them. It's already been agreed that a member of the Compact Group can be present at any meeting we have with the Council.

We have a good record of working with tenants. There are no hidden agendas, no secret meet-

ings and discussions. We're not pushing any particular option. Our role is to try to ensure that the maximum number of residents have the information they need to decide about the future of their homes.

OH: What did you learn from Stage 1 that will be helpful at Stage 2 of Housing Choice?

PPCR: The turnout in the referendum surprised everyone, including us. The result showed there is a lot of support for looking further at Housing Choice.

Our key lessons from Stage 1 are that residents must be fully involved from the beginning, residents are in the driving seat and its up to us to help them to define the agenda. There are real chances for genuine community control and empowerment. The opportunities are there to be grasped.

Residents wanting independent advice about Housing Choice can contact PPCR on freephone: 0800 317 066 (English) or 0800 587 4559 (Bengali).

Compact Group election results

The Borough-wide Compact Group (BCG) held its annual general meeting on 18th June 2002 and elected the following officers:

Chair	Bernard Cameron
Vice Chair	George Hutchison
Secretary	Gary Marsh
Treasurer	Andrew Mahoney.

Bernard Cameron said: "I am very pleased to be re-elected Chair after what has been a very challenging first year for the Borough-wide Compact Group. We have had to look at all sorts of issues, including the most important housing initiative that residents have ever had to face – Housing Choice.

"I want to thank the BCG members for putting in their time and working hard to make sure that all residents have the right amount of good information on which to base their own choices and decisions. I am also pleased to welcome so many new members on to the BCG. I hope they find that the time they put in is rewarding. By getting involved they can make a difference.

"I think that all of us on the BCG have learnt a lot – and that is good too, for the more we know the more we are able to control our own fate rather than leaving it all to the Council to make decisions for us."

The Borough-wide Compact Group provides a forum for tenants' views on housing matters. It also plays an important role in monitoring service standards. It provides a way for the Council to consult with tenants



■ The Compact Group gets down to work in its new premises.

on issues that affect their homes and the housing service they receive.

MEMBERS OF THE BOROUGH-WIDE COMPACT GROUP ARE:

George Hutchison – Brownfield Estate
 Patrick Campbell – Samuda Estate
 Dan Kelly – Birchfield Estate
 Mohammed Shahid Ali – Robinhood Gardens Estate
 Bernard Cameron – British Street Estate
 Andrew Mahoney – Leopold Estate
 Victor Stratton – Coventry Cross Estate

Ashadur Rahman – British Street Estate
 Gary Marsh – Gascoigne/Columbia Estate
 Nick Gopaul – Chicksand Estate
 Gill Iremonger – Christchurch Estate (Spitalfields)
 Paul Foote – Wither House TMO
 Valerie Nichol – Sidney Street Estate
 Derek England – Ocean Estate
 Nasim Uddin – Berner Estate
 Peter Hines-Tabner – Exmouth Estate
You can contact BCG members through the Consultation and Participation Team on 020 7364 7540.