

## Appendix 3 Consultation

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**1:** Although the focus of the consultation initiatives was older people, those of all ages were encouraged to take part, on the basis that in planning future services LBTH needs to take account of what future cohorts of older people will want as well as catering for the needs and preferences of the current older population. Responses to the consultation were invited through various channels including East End Life newspaper, the LB Tower Hamlets website, One Tower Hamlets website, the Tower Hamlets Involvement Network (THINK) event on 10th June 2010 and through a number of housing associations and voluntary organisations working with older people.

### Questionnaire

**2:** The council developed a questionnaire concerning housing in later life which has been completed by a wide range of people, both older and younger. It was a self selected sample and therefore the results cannot necessarily be claimed to be representative of the wider population of the borough. Wider surveys, with statistically significant sampling have been carried out as part of the housing needs survey; the purpose of this consultation was to try to obtain a more in-depth insight into older people's views about types of housing and the reasons behind the preferences expressed. The questionnaire was circulated through the Tower Hamlets website, and a range of service providers that have contact with older people. It was made

available both in hard copy and on-line; and where appropriate professionals and volunteers assisted older people in completing questionnaires: for example, Tower Hamlets Friends and Neighbours Network completed questionnaires through interviews with housebound older people.

**3:** A total of 184 responses were received, of which 42% were residents of sheltered housing and 16% were younger people (under 50 years) 73% of the sample lived in social housing, 7% rented privately and 14% owned their own home. The aspects of housing considered to be of greatest importance were accessibility (64% of respondents rated this as essential), 'a safe and secure environment' (73%) and help and support available when needed (70%).

### Focus Groups

**4:** Focus groups were carried out at four locations chosen with the aim of exploring the views of older people with different backgrounds, housing situations and experiences:

- Ted Roberts House: residents from a number of Gateway sheltered housing schemes.
- St Hilda's East Community Centre: a group from all tenures with a wide range of support and care needs.
- Appian Court Community Centre: a group from all tenures, mostly without care and support needs.

- Sonali Gardens Day Centre: a group of Bengali elders and younger people from the Bengali community, with a range of physical and mental health disabilities, mostly living with extended families.

**5:** Freedom, independence, safety and accessibility are themes that came through strongly in each case. Those not living in specialist housing displayed a reluctance to consider it, either because they were satisfied with their existing accommodation or because they considered they were too old to contemplate moving. The loss of 'community' and concerns about safety and security featured strongly amongst those who do not live in sheltered housing, as did concerns about its cost. The Bengali group expressed a strong preference to continue living with their families rather than consider sheltered or extra care housing.

**6:** The sheltered housing group were generally very positive about the scheme manager service but critical of administration of service charges and what they saw as too much regimentation through rules and regulations. Satisfaction with accommodation was generally high. A few would prefer larger (i.e. 2 beds) accommodation and a few would consider something smaller if it was cheaper. Communal lounges were valued, but most would prefer a washing machine in their own flat to a communal laundry.

**7:** There did not appear to be any appetite for additional facilities and services such as a restaurant, this was seen as more like a care home. Almost all of those taking

part in the groups said that they would prefer a level access shower to a bath.

**8:** Overcrowding and lack of accessible bathroom facilities featured very strongly in the responses from the Bengali elders group.

**9:** The sheltered housing focus group expressed a strong view that placing people with higher needs in sheltered housing was not appropriate, but accepted, in most cases, that those whose needs increased while living in sheltered housing should be allowed to stay: they could be supported more effectively since they were a part of the community within the scheme. It was felt by the sheltered housing focus group that Sheltered Housing and Extra Care Housing were different and should be kept as separate models. There was a general view, expressed both by sheltered housing residents and others that the term sheltered housing was unhelpful and that it needed re-branding.

**10:** People living in general needs housing identified the need for better lighting in communal areas and better security systems: cameras rather than spy-holes, the latter being difficult for older people to use. The primary concerns of people in general needs housing were focussed around neighbours and neighbourhood issues, including crime, upkeep of common areas, and the erosion of 'community'. The problem was caused by the sale of units purchased by Buy-to-Let landlords, who let it on short term tenancies, resulting in high turnover of residents and therefore difficulty in

establishing relationship with neighbours. Even with good neighbours, if they are younger they may be out at work much of the time and so older people can feel isolated during the day. Where older people are fortunate enough to occupy ground floor accommodation there are often problems created by families being housed above, owing to noise transference just from normal activities such as children running around. Most people in the groups indicated a preference to live amongst older people, but as part of the wider community.

#### Gateway Older Peoples Housing Commission

11. The 2010 work was augmented by further qualitative consultation carried out by Gateway Housing Association as part of its 2012 Housing Commission.

12. This included a mix of focus groups and individual telephone interviews and explored the views, experiences, needs and aspirations of older people with different backgrounds, housing situations and experiences. The engagement was targeted at people in the 50 – 70 age range and was clustered in a number of different areas of focus:

- A cross section of ethnic groups including Bangladeshi, Somali, White British and others, with community interpreters used to prevent language creating a barrier to understanding;

- Geographical locations where the 20 Gateway units for home ownership will be piloted – Bow and the Isle of Dogs;

- A cross section of older people with a potential interest in ownership options, including leaseholders living in ex-Right-to-Buy accommodation, leaseholders in general needs shared ownership accommodation, and other owner occupiers.

- Older people from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) communities.

12. Over the course of the engagement work Gateway consulted directly with 87 older people. This included three focus groups with 21 women and 6 men from the Bengali community, one focus group with 15 women from the Somali community and one focus group with 15 people from LGBT communities. Thirty four of those interviewed or participating in focus groups owned their own home.

13. In relation to the issue regarding what would make targeted home ownership schemes attractive to older person the following issues emerged:

- Making the accommodation physically desirable and economic to live in and maintain;
- Making the information about what's involved in moving, including the costs, easy to understand;
- Providing help, advice and support to guide people through the process from start to finish; and
- Providing practical and comprehensive help with the move itself.

Key issues that emerged and that

have been considered in detail in relation to the property include:

- Design and quality of the finish product
- Green space
- Location
- Permeable community space
- Communal space
- Costs
- Scheme size

14. The Commission's report provides a wealth of further qualitative information in relation to older people's aspirations, cultural preferences, concerns about security, finance, support services and location of housing. It suggests a high level of demand for accommodation that is more flexible and accessible than traditional sheltered models, but has some of the same benefits through separate but linked communal/"hub" facilities.

15. The report also takes into account the views of family members whose influence should not be underestimated. The findings also reinforced the earlier work that suggested a high level of demand for accommodation that is more flexible and accessible than traditional sheltered models, but has some of the same benefits through separate but linked communal/"hub" facilities.

#### Tower Hamlets Homes: Ageing Enquiry

16. Tower Hamlets Homes recognised that in order to understand how they can provide the best services and support for older residents, it would be beneficial to Inquiry into Ageing.

The Inquiry was borne out of a realisation that:

- whilst roughly a third of Council tenants and leaseholders were aged 65+, as a general-needs housing provider, THH had no specific service offer to the older age group
- the demographic profile of council tenants and leaseholders differs from that of the Borough more generally
- demographic indicators predict that the older segment will grow in size, and people will live longer.

16. Two workshops were held with residents in June and July 2012. The first was focused on property, including considering how accessibility needs are being met in the asset. The second focused on support – both the support that residents received but also the support they provided to others. There were between 16-18 participants at each session; a majority of participants were older people but there were also some younger people who were carers.

17. The concerns of workshop participants have been broadly grouped into four areas: Property, Building Communities, Customer Service, and Contractors. The Inquiry Panel has received a report on the findings and a set of 18 responsive 'policy ideas' has been drawn up which will be taken forward by Tower Hamlets Homes.