



# The future

## A message from our chief executive

2010–11 has been a year to celebrate. We have continued to make a positive difference to the lives of our residents, and the neighbourhoods where we work. But we know it's going to be more difficult to do this over the coming years and we have already started to focus on how we can make every pound we have to spend really count.



June Barnes,  
Chief executive, East Thames Group

The continued tough economic climate and the impact the Comprehensive Spending Review has had on local authorities and other public bodies, means that over the next five years, many of our residents and other people on low incomes are really going to be hard hit. We'll see essential living costs increase, jobs get scarcer and many more changes as a result of

welfare and housing reform.

In this context our focus is on supporting our residents and others through this difficult time. We are doing this in part through a major change programme that will look at our service offer to all our customers. The programme will reduce our costs, make us a more effective and efficient organisation, while retaining the enthusiasm and



commitment of our staff. It will build a stronger East Thames, allowing us to continue to build much needed homes, keep our existing homes in good order and provide a range of vital care and support services. It will also enable us to continue our successful community programmes, which have grown out of the needs of our local communities. These include helping people access training and find employment; supporting people to develop social enterprises that deliver local services; and bringing our neighbourhoods together to tackle local issues.

Essential programmes like these help us build sustainable neighbourhoods in areas impacted by high levels of deprivation and unemployment. For instance at the Ocean Estate in Tower Hamlets, a major regeneration project, we're working with project partners to deliver new and improved homes, and community programmes around employment, health and engagement.

Our other key project is through Triathlon Homes, our consortium with First Base and Southern Housing which will own and manage almost 1,400 new affordable homes on the Athletes Village after the 2012 Olympic Games. With our partners, we're gearing up to help deliver the important Olympic legacy to east London. It's a bold and ambitious project and no understatement to say we're part of creating a completely new community. Success for us will be seeing new families moving in to the Village after the Games and helping them make the most of the new employment opportunities in the area and really enjoy their new homes.

So times are going to be tough, but there are still opportunities to do what we believe. We are absolutely committed to maximising our investment in our neighbourhoods and making that positive and lasting difference which is what we are about. It's key to our future that we do this, because if we didn't, we wouldn't be East Thames.

# Looking ahead

In looking ahead to what we want to achieve over the next year, the 'so what' question will be ringing in our ears as we continually push ourselves to deliver better and cheaper services for our customers, remain focused on community regeneration and deliver more affordable homes.

## Better and cheaper services for customers

Our approach to training our staff to deliver excellent service has been recognised with an industry award. For us the challenge over the coming year will be to do even better, but for less money. We're looking at how we can reduce the costs of repairs to homes while also improving performance, especially first time repairs fixes. We'll also be looking into more self-service options which will bring down the costs but also meet the growing demand for online services.

## Innovation to improve mobility

With reform underway to housing and welfare arrangements, we'll also be focusing on adapting our services and finding innovative ways to help our residents find and maintain the right home for their family. One project we're looking forward to progressing over the next year is G15 London moves, a scheme that aims to improve the mobility of social tenants in London. This pilot project involves 15 of London's biggest social landlords who will each give 5% of their void properties over the next year to enable eligible residents to bid for G15 homes in other boroughs through a bespoke website [www.g15londonmoves.org.uk](http://www.g15londonmoves.org.uk). The scheme is currently helping G15 residents move to be closer to their work, or to downsize their home, but we also aim to eventually roll it out to enable any move, for any reason, within reason. The lessons learnt from the scheme will support the Mayor's plans to roll out a London-wide housing mobility system, and the two schemes may eventually be combined.

## Still developing new homes

Over the next five years we plan to build up to 1,000 new homes in east London and Essex, this includes existing developments that have already started onsite and new homes we plan to build as an approved development partner for the Homes and Communities Agency.

## Regeneration

Over the next year we will continue to work on four regeneration projects - three in Tower Hamlets (two on the Isle of Dogs and one in Stepney) and one in Waltham Forest.

In Tower Hamlets we are re-building two of our existing estates and increasing the density of the housing to offer more affordable homes in this borough where overcrowding is a significant issue.

We are also the lead partner in a consortium working on the **Ocean Estate in Stepney**, where we are refurbishing existing council homes and building new homes.

In Waltham Forest we are building a new 43-home scheme to replace an existing poor quality block of flats.



Construction work in Ocean Estate in Tower Hamlets.

**Regeneration** is a big undertaking and can be unsettling for residents. On New Union Wharf, an estate of just under 200 homes on the Isle of Dogs, we took a different approach. We gave residents a deciding vote on whether they wanted a complete regeneration or decent homes works. By a narrow margin the residents voted in favour of regeneration.

The current estate is poorly designed, there are structural issues which will be very expensive to fix and communal areas are not well used. We have been working with a residents' group and architects Jestico & Whiles on designs for the new homes and will be submitting a planning application at the end of 2011, with the aim of starting building the new homes in mid to late 2012. Not only will the existing households get new homes that are warmer and cheaper to run, we'll also be able to offer many more affordable homes in this area.

New Union Wharf: view from the courtyard podium looking towards the Thames.



## Greener communities

Another project we're looking forward to delivering over the next two years is our Inspired to Sustainable Living project which received £200k funding from Defra. We're using the inspiration of the 2012 Olympics to motivate our residents in Newham to adopt greener lifestyles by recycling more and saving energy and water in their home. Participating residents will receive a resource pack of tools and tips to help make their household more environmentally friendly. We'll also be training environmental volunteers to support their community in taking up the new environmental behaviours.

A key part of this project is understanding our residents' environmental behaviours and seeing which tools and methods are the most successful in bringing about household behaviour changes. What we learn from this will be incorporated into a final home environmental resource kit, rolled out to our homes on the Athletes Village and shared with the industry.

## In the business of charity

We've made good progress in reducing costs and increasing our surpluses. But there is more to be done and we have embarked on a two-year programme to make savings and improve customer services and our business controls – it's all about making East Thames a better business. We see ourselves as being in the business of charity. That means offering value for our funders, driving a hard bargain with our own contractors and partners and only doing things which are important to our customers. We want to make greater surpluses each year to fund more investment decisions, whether it's building more homes or community regeneration.