

# Doorstep challenge

When residents in Hackney grew tired of feeling isolated from the council's housing management service, they decided to bring the service closer to home. *Southern Housing* reports.

In April 1995, residents of the Clapton Park, Nye Bevan and Millfields estates in Hackney, East London, opted to enhance their role in managing their homes by forming a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO).

Although still funded by Hackney Council, the TMO and its Estate Management Board of 12 local residents were given full control over decision making and the everyday running of the estates.

Clapton Park, Nye Bevan and Millfields are relatively isolated from many of the services in Hackney because they are generally low income areas with poor transport links. Because of this, many local residents had become disillusioned with the arm's length management style of the local authority and the amount of time it took for repairs and maintenance to be carried out.

Tenant control would bring in services tailor made to the needs of local people, and would help target investment in community development and the local environment.

In taking charge, the TMO's primary objective was to present a more accessible, human face to housing management. It did so by hiring a dedicated team of staff to run the housing office based on Clapton Park. This meant tenants were able to develop stronger relationships with their respective estate managers because they were based on their doorstep, not a lengthy bus ride away at the Town Hall.

After being endorsed by local residents for a second seven-year term in 2002, the Clapton Park TMO pushed forward its objective of providing a comprehensive service by increasing its commitments in a number of areas, particularly the environmental appearance of its estates.

In July 2002, it appointed the Grass Roof Company to develop open spaces on the estates through a sustainable and sympathetic grounds maintenance programme.

Now, visit Clapton Park in the summer and you'll see a mix of native herbaceous plants instead of the old muddy boundaries. John Little of the Grass Roof Company said: "Walk through the estate in the summer and it's like no other."

The TMO has also taken the initiative in addressing the needs of vulnerable tenants by committing to an agenda of social development. First the TMO employed a community development worker and a welfare rights advisor. Then it established the Clapton Park Community Project, which is based at the Clapton Park Community Shop. This acts primarily as an advice and information service, although it is also a base for training courses, such as computer literacy and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes, that are tailored to local needs. The project has become an essential part of the estates.

In addition to the advice service, there are a





## The GRASS ROOT COMPANY

### Passionate about green spaces

**Grounds maintenance reinvented**

- Replace conventional herbicide use, we use colourful annual seed mixes
- We plant mostly native trees and shrubs / hedges
- We replace shrub areas with herbaceous / native flowers / edible plants
- We build compost bins on site to recycle all soft plant material

**Working with Clapton Park and the residents**

- Designed and built new community garden with living roof shelter
- Worked with Camberwell Art College to install artwork on the Estate
- Making Clapton Park a more vibrant and biodiverse place to live.**

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