

## HOUSING WITH RESPECT

### **Background:**

The project was set up in October 2003 and the original partners consisted of Devon and Cornwall HA, West Country Housing and Tamar Housing. In 2004 Plymouth City Council joined the project, to date as well as PCC there are now nine housing providers within the partnership, the additions being Signpost Housing Association, Plymouth Community Homes, Tor Homes, Sovereign Housing, Guinness Hermitage and Sanctuary Shaftesbury.

The aim of the Project was to support tenants of that partnership experiencing racial harassment. However, the project has now developed and expanded into a service that provides more general and ongoing support to enable BME tenants to secure and enjoy a safe and supported tenancy. In a government report into Causes of Homelessness in Ethnic Minority Communities, it was shown that;

‘Ethnic minority households are around three times more likely to become statutory homeless than are the majority white population. While ethnic minority households accounted for approximately 7% of the UK population in 2001, they represented 21% of the households accepted as homeless by local authorities in 2004-2005...A complex cycle of deprivation – that includes poverty, unemployment, low educational achievements, overcrowding, stress, ill health and social isolation, among others – affects a greater proportion of ethnic minority individuals than white people and can result in widespread social exclusion in some communities.’

*(Causes of Homelessness in Ethnic Minority Communities 2005 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister)*

The project has supported tenants around homelessness issues and on many other varying issues. The project is well known within the Plymouth community and within the local housing services.

### **Support Offered:**

Casework and support service for BME tenants, particularly around racial discrimination and harassment.

Tenancy Support e.g. applications, bidding and viewings, start of tenancy, utilities, completing benefit applications, planned resettlement (transfer due to racial harassment).

Advocacy e.g. challenging a decision made by housing providers, accessing housing, reporting incidents of anti social behaviour and racial harassment, liaising with housing officers and the police.

Signposting (Law Centre, Other relevant support agencies e.g. social services, refugee support services).

Information sharing - casework, passing relevant info to appropriate agencies.

Supporting letters - consideration for emergency/management transfers.

Attending Meetings e.g. Child Concern Meetings, Multi-Agency Meetings.

### **Support for Housing Providers:**

Support to housing officers to empower and assist when dealing with incidents of racial harassment and anti social behaviour.

Welfare visits to tenants at start of tenancy as requested by housing officers.

Joint home visit re tenants with housing issues.

Working with and providing support to housing officers re cultural sensitivities.

Bespoke interactive training to frontline housing staff, involving other local agencies and case studies, to improve the knowledge and confidence of housing officer in identifying BME tenants requiring additional support, challenging racism and providing a more culturally appropriate service.

Steering Group Meetings (monitors progress of project, information sharing, policy consultation, meeting on a bi-monthly basis.

Consultation work, e.g. Devon Inclusive Housing Project and the recent Devon Home Choice policy.