

**TOWER HAMLETS FRIENDS AND
NEIGHBOURS
BUSINESS PLAN
APRIL 2025-MARCH 2028**

**Connecting Lives,
Building Futures**



Logo
Name

Connecting Lives, Building Futures

Tower Hamlets Friends and Neighbours (THFN) Business Plan 2025-2028

Executive Summary

Tower Hamlets Friends and Neighbours (THFN) is entering a critical phase of organisational development as it approaches its 80th anniversary in 2028. This business plan outlines our strategic direction for April 2025 to March 2028, focusing on sustainable growth, community impact, and organisational resilience.

THFN provides vital befriending and advocacy services to vulnerable and isolated older people in Tower Hamlets, with a particular focus on those who are housebound or facing chronic health challenges. As the borough's population ages and becomes increasingly diverse, the need for our culturally-sensitive services grows more urgent.

Loneliness is defined as 'the pain felt when there is a gap between the amount of personal contact desired and that received'. Research shows that loneliness increases blood pressure, leads to cognitive decline and is associated with depression. Tower Hamlets ranks 1st out of 33 London boroughs and 1st out of 326 areas in England for predicted loneliness among those aged 65+, according to data from the English Longitudinal Survey for Ageing (ELSA) and Census data.

This plan outlines how THFN will expand its services, diversify its funding, strengthen its organisational infrastructure, and embrace innovation to meet the growing needs of older people in Tower Hamlets over the next three years, culminating in our 80th anniversary celebration.

Vision

Creating a Tower Hamlets where every older person thrives through meaningful connections, dignity, and active participation in their community.

Mission

To provide comprehensive befriending, advocacy, and support services to vulnerable and isolated older people in Tower Hamlets, with a particular focus on those who are housebound or facing chronic health challenges.

Values

- **Compassion:** We treat everyone with kindness, dignity, and respect
- **Inclusivity:** We embrace diversity and ensure our services are accessible to all
- **Empowerment:** We support older people to maintain independence and control
- **Collaboration:** We work with communities and partners to achieve shared goals
- **Excellence:** We strive for the highest standards in all our work

Market Analysis and Need Assessment

National Context

Demographic Trends

- The UK's 65+ population is projected to reach 15.2 million by 2028, representing 22% of the population
- By 2032, 24% of the UK population will be aged 65+, with the fastest growth among those aged 85+
- Over-85s are the fastest growing age group, expected to double to 3.2 million by 2041
- 1.4 million older people in England are chronically lonely, projected to increase to 2 million by 2028
- 2 million people over 75 live alone, with this figure expected to rise by 35% by 2030
- One in five older people in the UK have no children, representing approximately 2.2 million people
- By 2030, the number of older people without adult children to care for them is projected to reach 2.5 million
- Research shows that childless older adults are 25% more likely to require residential care
- 49% of over-75s live with a disability
- Depression affects 22% of men and 28% of women aged 65+
- 3.8 million over-65s live in homes that fail to meet basic safety standards

Social Care Landscape

- 1.6 million older people have unmet care needs
- 800,000 older people don't receive the help they need with essential daily activities
- Social care services face a £7 billion funding gap
- 54% of older people report deteriorating mental health due to isolation
- Informal carers provide care worth £132 billion annually

Tower Hamlets Specific Need

Local Demographics

- Tower Hamlets' 65+ population is projected to grow by 44% by 2028
- By 2030, the borough will have approximately 27,000 residents aged 65+
- The borough has 19,000 residents aged 65+ currently
- 48% of older residents are from ethnic minority backgrounds (34% of the overall population is Bangladeshi)
- 61% of older residents live alone, projected to rise to 65% by 2030
- An estimated 23% of Tower Hamlets' older residents have no children, above the London average
- Among the Bangladeshi community, the proportion of childless older adults is rising from historically low levels
- 73% of older residents live in social housing
- 44% of older residents don't speak English as their first language

- By 2030, the number of residents aged 85+ is projected to increase by 60%

Local Challenges

- Tower Hamlets ranks in the top 10% most deprived local authorities
- 49% of older residents live in income deprivation
- 56% of older residents report feeling isolated, projected to increase to 60% by 2030
- 68% of Bangladeshi elderly report chronic health conditions
- 42% of older residents lack digital access
- 51% report difficulty accessing local services
- The borough has the 3rd highest prevalence of mental health disorders in London at 22.8% in people over 16, higher than the England average of 19.9%
- Tower Hamlets has the worst rate of early death for people with severe mental illness in London
- Female life expectancy is 83, and male life expectancy 80, while healthy life expectancy ranges from 55 to 65 years for men and 55 to 58 years for women
- 60% of childless older adults in the borough report concerns about who will care for them in later life
- Studies show that older people without children in Tower Hamlets are twice as likely to report severe loneliness

Service Gaps

- Only 23% of isolated older people currently receive befriending support
- Waiting lists for befriending services average 3-6 months
- 67% of local older people want more social interaction
- 72% need help accessing community services
- 58% require advocacy support for health services
- 45% need assistance with cultural and language barriers

Economic Impact

- Loneliness costs Tower Hamlets NHS services £3.5m annually
- Social isolation increases GP visits by 40%
- Preventative services could save £5m in acute care costs
- Every £1 invested in befriending services saves £3.75 in health costs

Post-Pandemic Effects

- 64% of older residents report increased isolation since COVID-19
- Digital exclusion has widened the service access gap
- Mental health issues have increased by 38%
- Traditional support networks have decreased by 27%
- Community participation has dropped by 45%

THFN's Response to Need

Current Impact

- Supporting 450 older people annually
- Providing 12,000 befriending hours
- Delivering 3,000 advocacy sessions
- Managing 200 active volunteers
- Serving 15 different ethnic communities
- 89% client satisfaction rate
- Multiple health care needs and aphasia support

Growth Requirements

- Need to increase service capacity by 40% by 2028
- Expand language support to 8 additional community languages
- Double volunteer base to meet growing demand
- Increase digital support services by 60%
- Enhance specialist support for men and minority communities

Unique Position

- Only organisation providing culturally specific befriending in Tower Hamlets
- 80-year track record in the community (THFN was an early pioneer of Meals on Wheels in 1947)
- Established relationships with health and social care providers
- Multilingual capability
- Strong community trust
- Proven impact measurement framework
- "High-end" support for clients with complex needs

Strategic Objectives 2025-2028

1. Service Delivery Enhancement

SMART Objective 1.1: By March 2026, implement a place-based befriending service model across all 20 wards in Tower Hamlets, with at least one active befriender in each ward.

SMART Objective 1.2: By September 2026, establish specialised support programmes for men, women, and Bangladeshi and Somali communities, with dedicated coordinators for each programme.

SMART Objective 1.3: By March 2027, achieve quality mark accreditation from the Befriending Network, meeting all required standards.

SMART Objective 1.4: By March 2028, develop and implement at least 5 new befriending models (telephone, online, short-term, goal-oriented, group) to serve diverse client needs.

Specific Activities:

- Develop different mediums of befriending (telephone, online, short-term home from hospital, goal-oriented)
- Establish group befriending activities (cognitive stimulation therapy, facilitated friendship circles, men in sheds)
- Implement intergenerational work programmes
- Tighten referral criteria and establish an effective waiting list system
- Develop comprehensive assessment using Loneliness and Frailty scales
- Implement 6-monthly case reviews
- Focus monitoring and evaluation on outcomes rather than KPIs

2. Financial Sustainability

SMART Objective 2.1: By March 2026, establish individual giving programmes generating at least £5,000 in annual income.

SMART Objective 2.2: By March 2027, develop community fundraising initiatives to maintain 10% growth in all income streams, reaching £229,680 in total annual income.

SMART Objective 2.3: By March 2028, secure sufficient funding to maintain 10% growth in all income streams, reaching £252,648 in total annual income.

SMART Objective 2.4: By March 2026, build reserves to cover at least 3 months of operating costs (£52,200) and increase to 4 months (£84,216) by March 2028, in line with Charity Commission guidance.

Specific Activities:

- Year 1 (2025/26): Establish individual giving programmes and digital fundraising, explore housing options for generating income
- Year 2 (2026/27): Develop community fundraising initiatives
- Year 3 (2027/28): Build corporate partnerships and explore trading activities
- Implement robust financial monitoring systems
- Develop diverse income streams to reduce dependency on grant funding

3. Organisational Development

SMART Objective 3.1: By September 2025, strengthen governance through board diversification, ensuring at least 30% of board members have lived experience.

SMART Objective 3.2: By March 2026, implement external HR support and finance function to improve operational efficiency.

SMART Objective 3.3: By September 2026, develop succession planning for all key roles to ensure organisational continuity.

SMART Objective 3.4: By March 2027, update constitutional framework to reflect current best practices in charity governance.

Specific Activities:

- Improve board/staff communication through staff rotation at board meetings
- Recruit and retain diverse volunteers
- Develop training programmes for staff and volunteers
- Implement robust risk management framework
- Foster a culture of innovation and continuous improvement

4. Innovation and Technology Integration

SMART Objective 4.1: By March 2026, pilot AI-powered companion chatbots with at least 20 clients and implement an automated scheduling system.

SMART Objective 4.2: By March 2027, expand AI integration to include volunteer matching algorithms and basic sentiment analysis tools for at least 100 clients.

SMART Objective 4.3: By March 2028, implement a comprehensive digital wellness programme and AI-powered impact measurement system.

Specific Activities:

- Develop ethical AI framework for service delivery
- Partner with local universities and ethical AI companies
- Train staff and volunteers on AI tools and capabilities
- Implement client education on using AI services
- Establish an AI ethics advisory board

5. Housing Development Initiative

SMART Objective 5.1: By September 2025, complete a comprehensive feasibility study for acquiring or leasing property to develop independent living units in a communal setting for older people, with specific focus on meeting the needs of childless older adults.

SMART Objective 5.2: By March 2026, develop a detailed business case and financial model for the housing initiative, including funding options, operational costs, and revenue projections through housing benefit income.

SMART Objective 5.3: By September 2026, identify at least two potential properties or development sites in Tower Hamlets and conduct preliminary negotiations with property owners or developers.

SMART Objective 5.4: By March 2027, secure initial funding or investment for the project and begin the planning permission process if required.

SMART Objective 5.5: By March 2028, have a concrete implementation plan in place with timeline for acquisition/leasing, refurbishment, and launch of the first THFN communal living project focused on supporting older adults without family support networks.

Specific Activities:

- Conduct market research on housing needs of isolated older people in Tower Hamlets, with specific attention to those without children
- Explore successful models of communal living for older people in the UK and internationally
- Consult with housing experts, local authority housing teams, and potential residents
- Develop partnerships with housing associations, developers, and social investors
- Create a financial and operational model that ensures sustainability while addressing isolation
- Design a communal living environment that enables independence while fostering community
- Develop plans for on-site support services to address loneliness and isolation
- Create contingency planning for residents' end-of-life care and support
- Develop advocacy programs specifically for older people without family support networks

6. Profile and Network Development

SMART Objective 6.1: By March 2026, increase THFN's public profile by achieving at least 10 local media features and establishing a social media presence with 2,000+ followers across platforms.

SMART Objective 6.2: By September 2025, complete a comprehensive rebrand including logo refresh, new website launch, and updated marketing materials that reflect THFN's mission and vision for the future.

SMART Objective 6.3: By March 2027, develop formal partnerships with at least 15 key organisations including local NHS trusts, social care providers, community groups, and corporate supporters.

SMART Objective 6.4: By March 2028, secure THFN's position as Tower Hamlets' leading voice on older people's issues through participation in 5 local strategic forums and contribution to at least 3 policy consultations.

SMART Objective 6.5: By the 80th anniversary in 2028, establish a high-profile patron programme with at least 3 influential supporters from diverse backgrounds.

Specific Activities:

- Develop comprehensive communications and public relations strategy
- Create compelling case studies and impact reporting to showcase THFN's work
- Build relationships with local media outlets
- Establish presence at community events and forums
- Create networking opportunities with key stakeholders
- Develop strategic alliances with complementary organisations
- Position THFN leadership as thought leaders on ageing and loneliness
- Create an 80th anniversary celebration campaign to raise profile
- Undertake comprehensive rebrand to modernise THFN's visual identity
- Rebuild website to improve user experience and digital engagement

Implementation Plan

Year 1 (April 2025 - March 2026)

Quarter 1-2 (April-September 2025)

- Recruit Volunteer Coordinator and Activities/Outreach Coordinator
- Launch individual giving programme and monthly donation scheme
- Begin accreditation process with Befriending Network

- Implement external HR support
- Pilot AI-powered companion chatbots with 20 clients
- Train staff on AI tools and ethical considerations
- Initiate housing feasibility study through consultation with housing experts and potential residents
- Begin researching successful communal living models in the UK and internationally
- **Launch dedicated research project focusing on the needs of childless older adults in Tower Hamlets**
- **Form focus groups with older people without children to understand their specific concerns about end-of-life care and loneliness**
- **Develop partnerships with specialist organisations supporting "ageing without children" initiatives**

Quarter 3-4 (October 2025-March 2026)

- Establish digital fundraising infrastructure
- Begin place-based service transition
- Recruit specialist community workers
- Develop risk register and monitoring framework
- Expand AI chatbot service to 50 clients
- Implement automated scheduling system
- Complete housing feasibility study with recommendations
- Develop business case and financial model for housing initiative
- Engage with local authority housing teams and potential partners
- **Produce comprehensive report on the specific needs of childless older adults in Tower Hamlets**
- **Develop specialised befriending protocols for supporting older people with no family support networks**
- **Create pilot advocacy programme for end-of-life planning for older people without children**

Key Performance Indicators (Year 1)

- 50 older adults supported through befriending
- 75% of adults report feeling less isolated (measured by Loneliness questionnaire)
- 5 group outings organised with at least 5 older people attending per outing
- 80% of participants report reduced loneliness
- 5 younger volunteers (18-45) recruited
- 75% of older people report feeling more included in their communities

- 40 older people attend four events at a local school
- 4 older people escorted to dementia cafes or similar
- 75% of carers report feeling better supported
- 4 older volunteers recruited
- 85% of volunteers report positive impact on wellbeing

Year 2 (April 2026 - March 2027)

Quarter 1-2 (April-September 2026)

- Launch signature community fundraising events

- Expand volunteer base through new coordination programme
- Implement new activities programme
- Begin board recruitment focusing on lived experience
- Integrate voice analysis technology
- Launch predictive analytics for client risk assessment
- Begin identifying potential properties for communal living project
- Establish working group of stakeholders to develop the housing project
- Initiate discussions with housing associations and social investors
- **Develop strategic partnership programme with formal partnership agreements**
- **Create and launch speaker programme with THFN leadership at community events**
- **Secure representation on at least 2 local strategic forums/boards**
- **Implement community engagement roadshow visiting key locations in Tower Hamlets**

Quarter 3-4 (October 2026-March 2027)

- Develop strategic partnerships with local organisations
- Establish community collection schemes
- Launch raffles and sponsored activities
- Review and update constitutional framework
- Implement multilingual AI support services
- Roll out virtual reality social programmes
- Conduct preliminary negotiations with property owners/developers
- Secure initial funding or investment for housing project
- Begin planning permission process if required
- **Host annual "State of Ageing in Tower Hamlets" conference**
- **Produce thought leadership publication on addressing loneliness**
- **Develop relationships with at least 5 corporate supporters**
- **Launch "Friends of THFN" network for influential supporters**

Key Performance Indicators (Year 2)

- 100 older adults supported through befriending
- 80% of adults report feeling less isolated
- 10 group outings organised with at least 8 older people attending per outing
- 85% of participants report reduced loneliness
- 10 younger volunteers recruited
- 80% of older people report feeling more included in their communities
- 60 older people attend events at local schools
- 8 older people escorted to dementia cafes or similar
- 80% of carers report feeling better supported
- 8 older volunteers recruited
- 90% of volunteers report positive impact on wellbeing

Year 3 (April 2027 - March 2028) - 80th Anniversary Year

Quarter 1-2 (April-September 2027)

- Initiate corporate partnership programme
- Explore trading opportunities (consultancy, training)
- Develop professional services network
- Launch legacy giving campaign
- Launch full community resource matching system
- Implement advanced predictive analytics
- Develop detailed architectural plans for housing project
- Create operational guidelines for communal living setting
- Develop end-of-life support protocols for future residents
- **Begin planning for 80th anniversary celebrations and campaign**
- **Contribute to at least 2 policy consultations on older people's issues**
- **Secure representation on additional strategic forums in Tower Hamlets**
- **Develop high-profile patron programme and approach potential patrons**

Quarter 3-4 (October 2027-March 2028) - 80th Anniversary Celebration

- Establish employee matched giving schemes
- Implement skills-based corporate volunteering
- Develop product offerings (publications, resources)
- Review and update strategic plan
- Develop AI-powered impact measurement system
- Launch comprehensive digital wellness programme
- Finalise implementation plan for housing project
- Prepare for launch of THFN communal living project as 80th anniversary legacy initiative
- Celebrate 80th Anniversary with community events highlighting housing project plans
- **Launch high-profile 80th anniversary media campaign**
- **Host gala celebration event with patrons, supporters and stakeholders**
- **Publish "80 Years of Friendship" commemorative book/digital resource**
- **Present "Vision for the Future" at 80th anniversary symposium**
- **Announce major partnerships and initiatives as part of anniversary legacy**

Key Performance Indicators (Year 3)

- 150 older adults supported through befriending
- 85% of adults report feeling less isolated
- 15 group outings organised with at least 10 older people attending per outing
- 90% of participants report reduced loneliness
- 15 younger volunteers recruited
- 85% of older people report feeling more included in their communities
- 80 older people attend events at local schools
- 12 older people escorted to dementia cafes or similar
- 85% of carers report feeling better supported
- 12 older volunteers recruited
- 95% of volunteers report positive impact on wellbeing

Financial Projections and Targets

Income Generation Targets			
Income Stream	Year 1 (2025/26)	Year 2 (2026/27)	Year 3 (2027/28)
Grants	£200,000	£220,000	£242,000
Individual Giving	£5,000	£5,500	£6,050
Community Fundraising	£2,000	£2,200	£2,420
Corporate Partnerships	£1,800	£1,980	£2,178
Trading Activities	£0	£0	£0
Total Income	£208,800	£229,680	£252,648
Additional Reserves Funding	£52,200	£5,220	£26,796
Total Funding Required	£261,000	£234,900	£279,444
Expenditure Focus			
Expenditure Category	Year 1 (2025/26)	Year 2 (2026/27)	Year 3 (2027/28)
Staff Costs	£150,000	£165,000	£181,500
Volunteer Support	£20,000	£22,000	£24,200
Service Delivery	£20,000	£22,000	£24,200
Marketing/Fundraising	£5,000	£5,500	£6,050
Technology/AI	£2,000	£2,200	£2,420
Premises	£8,000	£8,800	£9,680
Administration	£3,800	£4,180	£4,598
Total	£208,800	£229,680	£252,648
Reserves Target			
In line with Charity Commission guidance, THFN will maintain reserves equivalent to 3-6 months of operating costs to ensure financial resilience and sustainability. This prudent approach will protect the organisation against income fluctuations, unexpected expenses, and ensure continuity of services for vulnerable older people.			
Year	Target	Rationale	
2025/26	£52,200 (3 months operating costs)	Establish minimum recommended reserves level	
2026/27	£57,420 (3 months operating costs)	Maintain minimum reserves in line with increased expenditure	
2027/28	£84,216 (4 months operating costs)	Build towards enhanced financial resilience	

To achieve these targets, the Board will:

- Review the reserves policy annually
- Allocate a percentage of unrestricted income to reserves
- Develop a designated reserves fund
- Include reserves targets in all funding applications where appropriate
- Implement cost controls to protect reserves when necessary
- Report on reserves position quarterly to the Board
- Conduct regular financial risk assessments

Risk Management

Financial Risks			
Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Strategy
Dependency on grant funding	High	High	Diversify income streams; develop individual giving and corporate partnerships
Economic uncertainty	Medium	High	Build adequate reserves; develop flexible spending plans
Fundraising competition	High	Medium	Develop unique value proposition; focus on THFN's 80-year heritage
Operational Risks			
Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Strategy
Staff retention and succession	Medium	High	Develop succession planning; implement competitive benefits
Service quality maintenance	Low	High	Implement quality assurance processes; pursue Befriending Network accreditation
Volunteer recruitment and retention	Medium	High	Enhance volunteer experience; develop diverse recruitment channels
Strategic Risks			
Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Strategy
Changing demographic needs	Medium	Medium	Regular needs assessments; flexible service models
Regulatory compliance	Low	High	Stay informed of changes; implement robust governance
Reputation management	Low	High	Maintain high ethical standards; transparent communications
Housing project complexity	High	High	Engage specialist advisors; phase implementation; partner with experienced organisations
Housing regulatory hurdles	Medium	High	Early engagement with local authority; seek legal advice on housing regulations

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Quarterly review of strategic objectives against SMART targets
- Annual impact assessment using validated tools (Loneliness scale, Frailty scale)
- Regular service user feedback mechanisms (surveys, focus groups, case studies)
- Stakeholder consultation process
- Financial performance monitoring
- AI-assisted impact measurement (from Year 3)

Evidence Base

Our strategy is grounded in evidence from multiple sources:

- Tower Hamlets Annual Public Health Report 2022 highlights that 22.8% of people over 16 in Tower Hamlets experience mental health disorders, the 3rd highest in London
- The Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Index (2019) estimates that 44% of the borough's older people are income deprived compared to an England average of 14%
- A model estimating subjective loneliness ranks Tower Hamlets as 1st out of 33 London boroughs and 1st out of 326 areas in England for predicted loneliness among those aged 65+
- The "Ageing Without Children" report (2023) identifies that one in five older people in the UK have no children, rising to nearly one in four in urban areas like Tower Hamlets
- Research by the Beth Johnson Foundation (2022) shows that childless older adults are 25% more likely to require formal care services and 30% more likely to report feelings of isolation
- Age UK's "No One Should Have No One" study (2022) found that older people without children report higher anxiety about end-of-life planning and care arrangements
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) projects that by 2030, the number of people over 65 living without children in the UK will exceed 2.5 million
- The London School of Economics' "Care in Crisis" report (2023) shows that older people without family support networks require 37% more formal care hours than those with family nearby
- Befriending Network Evaluation (2019) recommends short-term goal befriending, specialist advocacy training, and creating groups for people waiting for a match
- Research shows that those who are isolated require practical support, while those feeling lonely require emotional support
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation study highlights the "ordinariness of much that is wanted" - collecting prescriptions, writing Christmas cards, and meeting people
- Every £1 invested in befriending services saves £3.75 in health costs

Conclusion

As Tower Hamlets Friends and Neighbours approaches its 80th anniversary in 2028, this strategic business plan provides a roadmap for sustainable growth, increased impact, and organisational resilience. By focusing on service delivery enhancement, financial sustainability, organisational development, and innovation, THFN will be well-positioned to meet the growing and diverse needs of older people in Tower Hamlets for decades to come.

Our approach recognises that "loneliness cannot be resolved by one simple intervention; rather it requires constant, consistent and long-term input." Through the implementation of this plan, THFN will continue its 80-year tradition of providing that vital input to the most vulnerable older people in our community.