

OPEN DOOR

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Dear resident

I'm Susmita Sen your new Chief Executive and I'm delighted to have joined Tower Hamlets Homes (THH).

It's really important to me that whether you're a tenant or a leaseholder you feel that we are working with you and with your best interests at heart.

I have already had the chance to meet several inspiring residents. And I know that the team at THH has done a lot of good work to improve housing services. I also recognise that there is much more to be done. And that is why I feel it is time for us to ensure that we provide the consistently brilliant customer service you deserve. In this edition of Open Door you can find out how we are improving our repairs service – by keeping it simple. You'll notice a fresher, more tailored approach that's all about getting things right first time.

Our Decent Homes programme continues to help us invest in homes to be proud of. But we recognise that we can do much more to make things easier for customers and involve you earlier in the process. As an organisation we must ensure that we are always listening, learning and improving. With this in mind being more open and transparent with you will be at the heart of our Decent Homes work as we continue making your homes, safe, secure and warm places for the future.

There's also a feature on how you can get involved in your neighbourhood. Talking and listening to you is a vital stepping stone as we seek to be an organisation which constantly listens, learns and looks to improve.

I look forward to visiting your neighbourhood soon.

Susmita Sen
Chief Executive

"We're really happy to see bigger homes being created to support families with additional needs."

Rohela, Bethnal Green

New Homes: Bradwell Street



The Begum family eagerly looking forward to seeing one of the new disability adapted homes at Bradwell Street.



This is an exciting time for us - our first new council homes at Bradwell Street in Bethnal Green were recently completed.

This vital development includes nine family houses (three of which have disability adaptations) and three two-bedroom flats. As well as brand new homes, there will be a community centre on site that will be available for everyone in the local neighbourhood.

In addition to the homes at Bradwell Street, this autumn will see THH take on the management of 40 brand new homes at the London Borough of Tower Hamlets' development of Dame Colet Court in Stepney.

Both projects are creating much needed housing in the borough and homes to be proud of.



News in brief

In and around our neighbourhoods

Summer Night Lights

In partnership with the council and the Metropolitan Police, there were four nights of fun activities across the Boundary and Collingwood estates over the summer bank holiday weekend. Popular activities included a BBQ, bouncy castle and face painting. The lively events were a celebration of community and youth engagement – with a mission to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour by promoting the positive attitude in our neighbourhoods.



Talented and tenacious



Residents from across Tower Hamlets celebrated their achievements this summer after completing an inspiring borough-wide training programme coordinated by THH. Ann Lucas, Chair of our Board and Councillor Sirajul Islam, the council's Cabinet Member for Housing (and Deputy Mayor) presented certificates to residents for completing training courses. Subjects included basic housing law, treasurer skills, public speaking and project management.

More fantastic opportunities will be made available this autumn. Find out more on our website and Facebook page.

THH residents get healthy



The successful Redcoat Active Forum was set up two years ago by THH resident Abdul Hannan and encourages men over the age of 40 to get active and improve their health. The group, which meets weekly in Stepney, is open thanks to the generous support of THH parking contractors, NSL. For more information email the group at redcoat.active@gmail.com

File in the fridge



This free scheme is designed to encourage elderly or vulnerable residents of any age who need help to keep their medical details in a plastic pot in a common location – the fridge. The pack gives you the means to alert the emergency services to important medical information and contact details, should an accident or sudden illness occur in your home. Find out more on our website or call us on **020 7364 5015**.

Independent Board Members

We're pleased to announce that Councillors Marc Francis, John Pierce, Helal Uddin and Sabina Akhtar have been appointed to the THH Board and new Independent Board Members Caroline Compton-James and Andrew Bond will be joining them in the next few weeks.

Modern homes you can be proud of

By March 2016 we will have modernised an incredible **9,000** homes

This investment is part of our Decent Homes programme, which last year saw us carrying out major improvement work on 5,367 homes and we're pleased that this makes our programme the biggest in London.

We are working to create homes which are safe, wind and watertight, with modern kitchens and bathrooms, and efficient heating. We want you to have homes you can be proud of.

However, we also know that sometimes these works can be disruptive and complicated. And so we want to do more to ensure that your Decent Homes experience is as easy as possible.

One of our key aims, alongside the need to provide warm, safe and dry homes, is to make sure that we continue to provide **value for money**. Our Decent Homes contracts were agreed in 2011 when prices were low and these prices remain fixed (have

not increased). Additionally, we carry out checks regularly, to make sure that we are not being overcharged for major works or carrying out repairs that are unnecessary.

What are we doing?

- we only pay for work that is completed – if a survey tells us that a roof needs to be replaced but we find out that it can be repaired, we will repair it instead;
- we carry out regular site visits, so that we can check that any major works being carried out are up to standard. We don't pay for work until it meets our standards and residents are welcome to join us on these visits;
- all major works are under warranty for 12 months – if something is wrong, let us know so that our contractors can fix the problem.



**Decent
Homes**

Leading to decent jobs



“Many, many thanks for installing a new door. It is less drafty. We feel safe and secure – and it looks lovely. Excellent job!” Memnune, Shadwell

Decent Homes – inside and out What work have we been doing?

Our priority last year was the installation of new kitchens and bathrooms; this year our focus will mainly be exterior repairs, like the installation of new roofs, double glazed windows and repainting blocks and walkways. This work will make homes warmer and weather resistant, and the updated exteriors and common areas will make our neighbourhoods nicer places to live.



More advice for Leaseholders

We know that we can make the Decent Homes programme more accessible and transparent – particularly if you are a leaseholder. Although we already carry out resident and leaseholder engagement, we understand that you need more from us.

We know that bigger bills can be worrying and sometimes the explanation for high charges is not always clear. We want you to have confidence in the decisions behind all the work we carry out and we are Here to Help you through the process.

Look out for information – letters, posters and text messages – inviting you to a consultation meeting. These meetings are your opportunity to find out about the work, find out why it is needed, talk to our surveyors and get an estimate of the cost.

If you need our help and are worried about a major works bill, **please get in touch** – we can talk to you over the phone or face to face about all of the options available to you and the help that we can provide.

What's new:



talking and listening to you – **before** work starts;



more informal events, so that we can offer you more help if you need it;

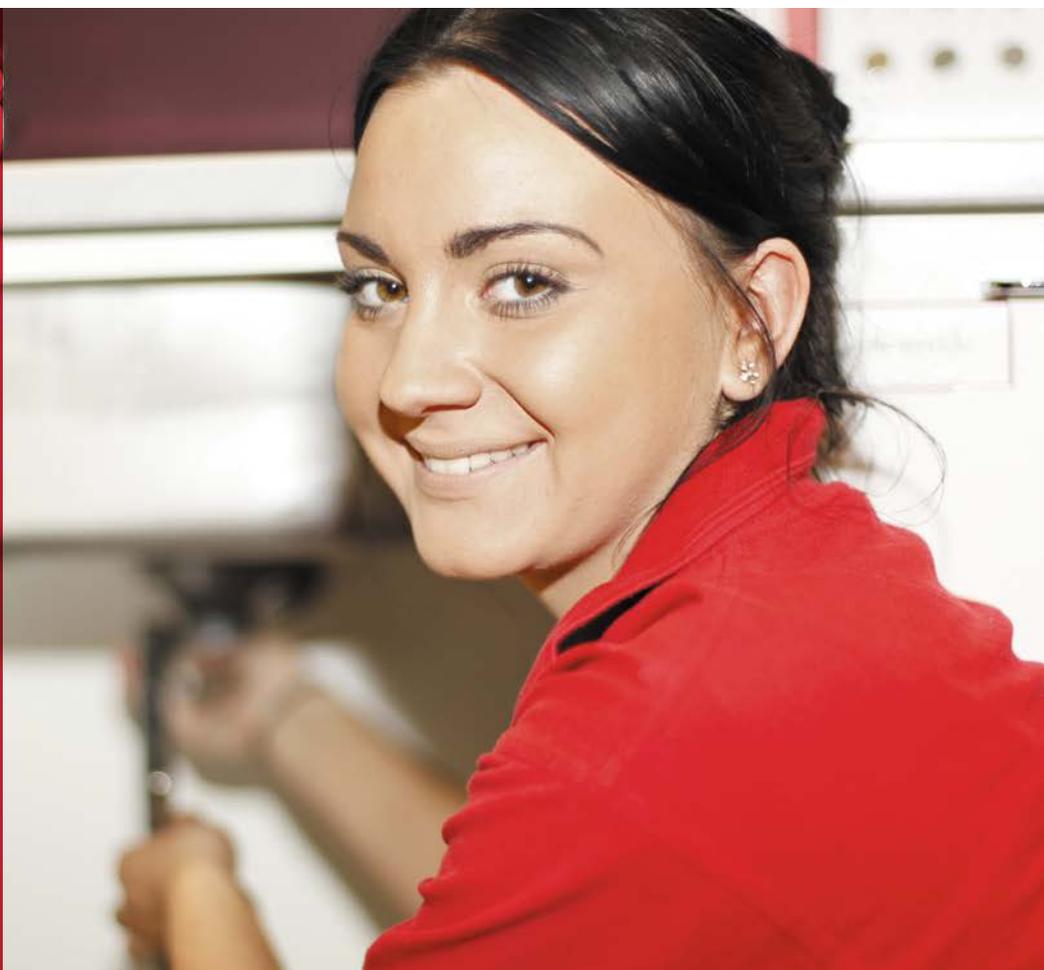


more inspections with you before any major works are signed off as complete, so that we know you are satisfied that the work is up to standard.

Our repairs service – keeping it simple

We want to keep our repairs service simple and also get our repairs 'right first time'.

Our priority is brilliant customer service across Tower Hamlets Homes and the repairs service is no exception. Our focus is to provide you with a repairs service that is easy to access and simple to understand.



What are we doing?

- improving the way we handle your calls so that when we send someone to carry out a repair, we can be sure we are sending the right person who can solve the problem on the first visit;
- making all of our repairs information clear and easy to understand;
- improving the inspection of properties before we give you the keys.

What else is new?

- DIY classes and films, so that you can tackle simple problems yourself.

More generally, we will carry out more planned, proactive maintenance repair work, which will save money in the longer term.

Our new maintenance programme will focus on fixing problems like gutter clearances and plumbing leaks. We know that some blocks are more at risk of gutter problems – so we will target those blocks before leaks occur, stopping the problem from getting out of hand. Similarly, any households that have a history of multiple leaks will get a plumbing check to try to resolve all the issues in one go.



Last year we carried out **55,000 repairs**.
That's a staggering **six repairs an hour!**



A tailored service

Starting from September, we will have a more tailored repairs service – focusing on those of you who need us most of all.

By matching information on the repairs' history of a property with what we know about you – our residents, we can see patterns among certain groups that will allow us to tailor repairs to meet the needs of those groups.

We have been piloting this approach over the past few months, with our repairs contractor Mears, focusing on particular groups which have been found to have higher than average demands.

For example, this might mean that someone who is elderly or vulnerable may be offered a full Property MOT, so that we can identify all of the possible repair problems – and then fix them, in one go.

By offering a more tailored and targeted service we hope that there'll be more satisfaction for you and fewer repeat visits for our contractors.



How can you help us to make the service even better?

As a tenant, you have a responsibility for helping to maintain certain standards in your home. These are laid out in the Tenants' Handbook:

- let us know as soon as possible if a repair needs to be carried out;
- use your home in a 'tenant like manner'. This means that you must look after the basics in your home, for example, using ventilation if it is provided, cleaning your windows, replacing fuses and unblocking sinks;
- keep your home in good condition and get written permission from us before you carry out any improvements;
- if you are elderly or disabled and live alone we will carry out most minor repairs for you – please check with us;
- remember – if you damage your home or cause disrepair by neglect you may have to pay for it.

*If you are currently in the process of purchasing your home through Right to Buy, we may only be able to carry out essential Health and Safety repairs to your home; if you're not sure, check with us.

Get involved!

There are lots of ways that you can get involved and make a real difference in your neighbourhood, from joining your local Tenants' and Residents' Association to starting up a community food garden. Read more below.



Making things better, together

From anti-social behaviour (ASB) to repairs – our residents are helping us to improve services. You could help to shape the way we work by joining one of five Service Development Groups, made up entirely of residents: ASB, Environmental, Leasehold, Repairs and Resident Access.

By working together with residents, we have made some key improvements, including:

- making the ASB service more accessible – we now handle all calls through one number – 020 7364 5015;

- trying out different solutions to the problem of fly-tipping and dumping of waste, to see what works, so that we can reduce the problem;
- improving the dispute resolution process for leaseholders, so that complaints are easy to make and are handled in a clearer way;
- offering simple solutions to repairs issues (such as free meters to check moisture condensation levels);
- writing an easy guide to services available via the 5015 number.

Your home, your neighbourhood

As well as opportunities to join the THH Service Development Groups and Panels, you can make your local neighbourhood a better place to live by getting involved in:

- **Tenants' and Residents' Associations** – The TRAs are a great way to work with other residents, teaming up to tackle issues and improve your neighbourhood.
- **Local Safer Neighbourhood Ward Panels** are run by the police and by participating you will be working to help shape local policing priorities to address ASB, and crime in your area.

You can also **volunteer** at your local community centre to help run activities or even arrange events. Visit our website or contact your Neighbourhood Engagement Officer for more details.

We inspect your area every month to make sure it is up to scratch – you can come along to the next inspection. Your local knowledge and insight could be invaluable. For more on **neighbourhood inspections** check your local noticeboards or visit our website.

Across our neighbourhoods our **Community Food Gardens** are giving residents without gardens



a new opportunity. The gardens recently won an outstanding approach to empowering local communities' award at the UK Housing Awards - the most prestigious awards in the social housing sector. Among the real inspirations for the project are Margaret Cox and Margaret Wilson, and there are now more than 1,500 residents involved – see page 9.

FREE training

Over the coming months Tower Hamlets Homes, in partnership with other local housing providers, is offering free workshops to help you improve your skills, knowledge and experience. These free workshops offer a great opportunity to learn something new, meet other residents and make a difference where you live. Details of all the available courses will be published on our website at the end of the month.

To get involved or find out more, contact us: residentengagement@thh.org.uk or **020 7364 5015**

“The garden really promotes neighbourliness between people from different backgrounds. It also makes a big contribution to peoples’ lifestyles...” Susy Powlesland

Glorious gardens, inspiring people



Nestled in the heart of Bethnal Green, the Victoria Park Square Estate is a peaceful patch of grassland – a garden which feels like an oasis in the midst of the city.

Here you’ll find the Globe Community Food Garden – a cooperative run by residents of the estate and locals from across the community.

One of those residents is the exceptional and green-fingered Susy Powlesland, who founded the community garden five years ago. Having lived in Bethnal Green for over 30 years, Susy and a handful of other residents were inspired to set-up the garden because they wanted to grow food in the company of their friends and neighbours.

Susy and one of the gardens’ regular helpers, Sarah, spoke to Open Door about how the project started and why it has made their neighbourhood a nicer place to live.

Susy explained “It’s a real mix, old and young, all ethnicities –

everyone is welcome. We have members from every community, – this garden is probably the only project that I’ve come across where people from different ethnicities and backgrounds actually work together.



The motto of this garden is ‘share the work, share the produce.’ So people go home with a basket full of vegetables and that’s a

great incentive. And then people start to ask questions of each other, like ‘what vegetable is this, how do you cook this?’ Then people share recipes, and start to share food.”

Sarah shares this view and explains, “It’s lovely being out in the fresh air and it’s nice to have something to look after that’s local and shared with other people. It creates a good feeling of being part of the whole community.”

The garden brings together people who would never normally meet. By gardening together, they get to know each other – and each other’s culture, without even realising.

Yet, despite her remarkable enthusiasm and experience, even Susy has occasionally been surprised by what the project has produced. She explains with a smile, “I’ve eaten vegetables that I’ve never even seen before!”

- If you want to join Susy and Sarah, you can email them at globefoodgarden@gmail.com – no matter how green fingered you are. Anyone living within a mile or two of the Victoria Park Estate is welcome.
- Want to start your own garden? Email: contactus@thh.org.uk or visit www.thh.org.uk

News

“The service is great, I’m able to log in easily and view my rent account at home whenever I want. I no longer have to call, listen to automated options and wait for a staff member to tell me what my rent balance is and how much I need to pay.” Marianne, Bethnal Green, ‘See My Data’ user.

Click, view and pay, the easy way

You can now get secure access to your housing information through a FREE website called **See My Data**.

Using the site is easy and means that you can pay your **rent**, check your **housing benefits** payment and even report a **repair** online. It’s simple and will give you secure, 24 hour online access to your rent account.

You can:

- ✓ view your rent account balance and statements;
- ✓ check recent payments including Housing Benefit;
- ✓ report a repair.



Making a payment is quick and easy and can be done using our automated phone line, online payment or the ALL PAY app.

To use See My Data you must be a tenant of THH (and have a rent account set up with us) OR be a facility holder (i.e. you rent a garage, shed or car space from us but are not a tenant).

To register you must have the following details ready:

- your rent account number (as it appears on your rent statement);
- first name and last name;
- date of birth.

- 1 Go to our website www.thh.org.uk
- 2 Click on ‘See My Data’ – to start registration. It’s easy!

We want to make it as easy as possible for you to manage your finances. Sign up today!

Save water, save money

If you live alone or if you don’t use much water at home you can save money by switching to a water meter – a device that measures how much water you use. Fitting a water meter is usually free and, once installed, most people find that the amount of water they use reduces – this saves money and helps the environment.

You can reduce your bill even further by installing a range of easy to fit water-saving devices around your home. You can order these devices free from Thames Water.

For more information phone **0800 980 8800** or visit: www.thameswater.co.uk



WaterSure Plus – Help with your water bill

We know that for some of you paying a water bill can be a worry, especially if you have a low income.

Thames Water has introduced **WaterSure Plus** which can provide help to residents with 50% of their water charges.

To qualify, you or a member of your household must be in receipt of certain benefits such as:

- Housing Benefit
- Income Based Job Seeker’s Allowance
- Working Tax Credit or
- Child Tax Credit

Your water bill must also be at least 3% of your net household income (net means the money you bring home after any deductions or credits).

For an application form contact Thames Water on **0800 009 3652** (Mon-Fri 9am to 5pm) or visit: www.thameswater.co.uk/watersureplus

If you are of **working age** and claim welfare benefits you may be affected by the Government's changes to the benefit system, known as '**Universal Credit**'.

It is important that you understand the new system as it will affect anyone of working age, currently receiving any of these benefits:

- Income Support
- Job Seekers Allowance
- Working Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Employment Support Allowance (Income Related)
- Child Benefit

If you are in receipt of any of these benefits you will be switched to Universal Credit by 2017.

In Tower Hamlets, Universal Credit has been introduced for all new, single claimants of Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA). By 2017 all working age claimants of most benefits will also receive their payments through Universal Credit. You will be told in advance of any move to Universal Credit by the Department for Work and Pensions.

What are the main changes?



your benefit will be paid directly into your bank account, so you must have a bank account to receive payment;



payment will be made once each month and in arrears;



all your benefits entitlement, including Housing Benefit, will be paid direct to you and you will be responsible for paying your rent, in full, to Tower Hamlets Homes;



claims for Universal Credit will be made online.

This will not apply if:

- you or your partner receive pension credit.

Where can I get more advice?

We are Here to Help. Call us for an appointment and we will explain the Welfare Reform changes to you, give you the help, support and advice you need to manage these changes.

The most important thing is to seek help now if you are unsure about how these changes will affect you.

You can call us on 020 7364 5015 (option 3 and then 3 again) or email welfare.reform@thh.org.uk

**Contact us****Website**
www.thh.org.uk**Facebook**
www.facebook.com/
towerhamletshomes**Twitter**
Follow us @THHomes**Phone**020 7364 5015
8:30am to 5:30pm Monday to
Friday. (10am to 5:30pm on the
last Wednesday of every month).**Text-phone**Call us with the help
of BT Text Relay
18001 020 7364 5015**Email****For general enquiries**
contactus@thh.org.uk**For rents**

rents@thh.org.uk

For service charges

leasehold@thh.org.uk

Write to usPO Box 66355
London E14 1GU**Repairs
helpline**For when you need to report
a repair or ask us about the
progress of a repair that has
been already reported. Someone
is available 24 hours, every day.**Phone**020 7364 5015
0800 376 1637
(free from landlines, call charges
from mobiles may vary)**Email**repairs@thh.org.uk
(not for emergency repairs)**Anti-social
behaviour**For when you need help or
advice on anti-social behaviour.**Phone**020 7364 5015
Call 999 in an emergency.
Police non-emergency number
dial 101.**Translations
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Accessibility**This is Open Door – your
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If you would like this in large
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language visit your local
Housing Office or contact us
via phone or email.**Phone**

020 7364 5015

Email

contactus@thh.org.uk

এটি ওপেন ডোর - আপনার বারার হাউজিং সংবাদ। আপনি যদি এটি বড় বড় অক্ষরে, অডিওতে বা আপনার কমিউনিটির ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে আপনার নেইবারহুড হাউজিং অফিসে চলে আসুন অথবা আমাদের সাথে টেলিফোনে বা ইমেইলে যোগাযোগ করুন।

War-sidahan waa 'Albaab Furan' (Open Door) akhbaar guryo guud ahaan degmada aad deggan tahay. Haddaad dooneyso in warkan lagu soo qoro qoraal waawayn, hab maqal ah ama luqadda jaaliyadaadu ku hadasho booqo Xafiiska Guriyaynta Jiiraanka ee ku yaalla xaafaddaada ama kula soo xiriir xafiiskeenna hab telefoon ama email.

Your local Housing Offices**1 Rushmead**

Bethnal Green, London, E2 6NE

Opening hours

- 9am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday (except the last Wednesday of every month 10am to 4.30pm)
 - 9am to 12.30pm Saturday
 - Closed Bank Holidays
- Please note last entry is 30 minutes before closing.

Idea Store, Watney Market

260 Commercial Road, London, E1 2FB

Opening hours

- 9am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday (except the last Wednesday of every month 10am to 4.30pm)
- 9am to 12.30pm Saturday
- Closed Bank Holidays

Access (both offices): Wheelchair access, automatic doors, hearing induction loop, magnifier sheets, language translation, private interview rooms, assistance dogs welcome, breast-feeding friendly accredited.