



## Go for it, say THH apprentices p5

THH boss bids farewell p2

Here when you need us – tenant support p6

Are you ready for changes to your benefits? p9

# Dear Resident



**I wanted to let you know that I will be leaving THH at the end of May after six years in charge, to be Chief Executive of a housing association.**

It has been a real privilege to be the Chief Executive of Tower Hamlets Homes. I can't say it has always been easy nor that we have always got things right, but I am absolutely clear that we have always done things for the best reasons.

I also genuinely believe that services have improved during this time, despite having to provide them with two-thirds of the money we had when we started.

There are many things that I will miss about working at THH. I have had some wonderful times, worked with some great teams and individuals, and met some truly inspiring residents.

The board is now in the process of finding my successor and we will let you know who that is, as soon as we can.

I wish them 'Good Luck', and wish you all the very best for the future.



**Gavin Cansfield**  
Chief Executive  
Spring 2015

## News in brief

---

### Neighbourhood Plans nearly ready to hatch

The issues for each neighbourhood area have now been agreed with residents, and we are just costing the various proposals and identifying priorities.

We will shortly produce the final plans and share them with residents for comments.

---

### Half way to Decent Homes

The completion of the 5,000th decent home takes our decent homes programme, the largest in London, past the half way mark. In the next few months, we are on course to reach the 6,000th decent home, and the 9,000th by March 2016.

---

### Housing office closing down on 26 June

The THH housing office at 542 Roman Road, will be closed permanently from 5pm on 26 June. You will not be able to use this office, but you can visit our offices at Rushmead and Watney Market (see back page for details).

If you normally use the Roman Road office and have an enquiry, please call us on: 020 7364 5015.

---

### Cash back for tenants

THH Welfare Reform Team has helped 18 tenants reclaim £130,000 in overpayments of non-dependent charges.

The team has also referred 36 residents to partner agencies to help them apply for other benefits due to them.

For Welfare Reform queries contact:

 020 7364 5015 (option 3)

 [welfare.reform@thh.org.uk](mailto:welfare.reform@thh.org.uk)

# New repairs will show we really are Here to Help

A new, better repairs' service is coming your way. Here's a taste of what that means for you.



Do you call out the repairs service to put money in your electricity meter or to bleed your radiators? No, of course you don't. But some tenants do!

## New Repairs Service

- Property MOTs
- Routine gutter clearances
- Plumbing Checks
- Fat Trap installs

We have looked at the pattern of repair call outs, who is making the calls and what repair was required. We found that some tenants requiring frequent repairs need support to become more self reliant, while others have properties which might be vulnerable to snags and repair issues.

So what are we going to do about it?

## Property MOTs

We are launching Property MOTs, similar to your annual car MOT, to bring the property up to standard, thereby reducing some residents' 10 to 15 repair call outs a year.

Also, where we find that tenants are capable of fixing a small problem we will teach them some basic DIY, such as how to bleed a radiator.

**'By reducing the number of unnecessary or preventable repair call outs, we will have more time and resources to respond quicker to every day repairs. We will be better and smarter, aiming to fix your problems in one visit, at a time agreed with you.'**

## Clearing out your gutters

We are also launching a new maintenance programme, based on repairs' histories, aimed at nipping problems in the bud and preventing them in the first place.

For example, we have already identified 84 blocks at risk of gutter problems, and have begun a routine gutter clearance programme on these to prevent leaks and overflows.

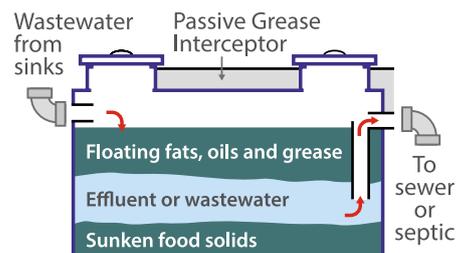
## Plumbing checks

Households that report constant leaks will get a plumbing check to ensure all is sound. This should reduce call outs, freeing resources for day to day repairs.



## Fat traps to mend blocked sinks

We also want to reduce the 3,550 calls we get about blocked sinks. Every year THH engineers remove tons of fat from blocked waste pipes, often re-visiting the same properties. We will identify the properties with the highest demand and install a device to take the fat out of the drain.



All these measures will save time and resources, and will mean we can focus more on dealing with day to day repairs.

## We're on your side!

### THH backs residents and urges Sainsbury's to think again...

When some residents contacted us about early proposals by Sainsbury's to use land next to their estate for access and emergencies, we were keen to get involved and hear what residents had to say.

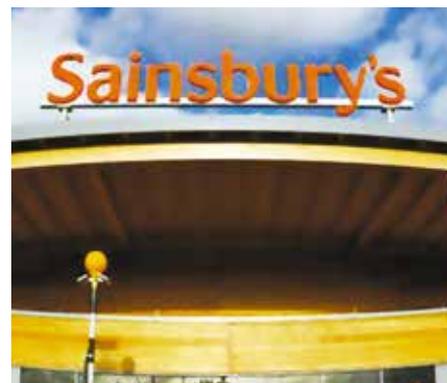
They were concerned about the potential impact and disruption the proposal could have on those living on Sidney South estate. We listened carefully to residents' concerns and made it clear that we fully supported them. Our conversations with them were vital

in helping us accurately represent their views on this development when we met with Sainsbury's.

We're now hopeful that Sainsbury's will listen, and seriously rethink their initial plans.

Creating and sustaining vibrant neighbourhoods continues to be a huge priority for us. That means listening to residents and coming down on their side when we can. Our firm view with Sainsbury's may have encouraged them to think again.

One resident said: 'I was really anxious about these plans. Sainsbury's is almost on our doorstep and the last thing we



need is more development, with the potential for more noise and traffic. It's been reassuring to have THH support us – it really felt like they were on our side.'

## You know best!

### Keeping communal areas safe, secure and clean is an issue that affects estates across the borough.

One resident's small potted garden on a communal walkway, is another resident's clutter: a discreet washing line in one corner might be a serious obstruction in another.

It can be difficult to find the correct response to concerns about communal areas, and we haven't always got it right. Because we recognise that, on certain issues we want to get tenants' views, before laying down the law.

Clearly, any obvious hazard must be removed, but many issues involving communal walkways are not so simple.

When residents on the Collingwood estate highlighted concerns about items left on communal balconies, we visited the block. We found a shopping trolley, fixed washing lines, mops and buckets, children's bikes, plant pots, and even shoes on the balcony. As well as being an eyesore, some of these were a safety hazard, prompting us to take action to get them removed.

**'We know there are times when we should work with the community to look more holistically at an issue... that way we can work with residents to find a safe solution'**



However, after listening to residents we are now looking at adopting a more flexible approach that might remove safety hazards while allowing for some limited balcony use.

It's clear that sometimes tenants know best how to deal with issues on their doorstep, and by having conversations with them, we are changing how we address some tricky issues.

THH, Head of Neighbourhoods, Beverley Greenidge said: 'We know there are times when we should work with the community to look more holistically at an issue – rather than throwing the rule book at it – that way we can work with residents to find a safe solution, particularly with our open balconies.'

THH is pledged to work with the Tenant and Resident Associations (TRA) on tricky issues like these. If you want your views to be heard why not attend your TRA meetings, to make sure your views are reflected in THH policies. We are on your side!

If there aren't any TRAs in your area, why not set one up? We can offer you advice, support and training. For more information contact us:

 020 7364 5015

 [www.thh.org.uk](http://www.thh.org.uk)  
(see the 'get involved' section)

 [residentengagement@thh.org.uk](mailto:residentengagement@thh.org.uk)

# Go for it

**THH has created more than 132 apprenticeships by teaming up with our Decent Homes contractors.**

Almost half the apprentices who have finished have been offered full-time work or further training with the contractors.

The apprentices are covering all aspects of construction including quantity surveying, electrical work, plumbing, carpentry and clerical work.

Thirty two per cent are women and more than half come from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

The apprenticeship programme is one of the community benefits of the Decent Homes' works.

Ruhul Amin, is an apprentice Resident Liaison Officer. He said: 'My training has really helped me to build excellent practical and theoretical knowledge.'

Apprentice Business Support Officer, Mohammad Abdulla, 22, is

now taking further training following his successful apprenticeship. He said:

'An apprenticeship is not making coffee for your boss, it's a real job. You can really move on in life with an apprenticeship and learn things for yourself that a classroom can't teach you. 'If you get this chance, go for it'.

**Contact: Skillsmatch**

☎ 020 7364 4900

✉ [constructiondesk@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:constructiondesk@towerhamlets.gov.uk)



Mohammad (above) and Ruhul (right)



## Spidermen Save Heating



**THH found a novel way of quickly inserting cavity wall insulation into more than 480 homes, without disrupting residents.**

Instead of using scaffolding, trained engineers abseiled down the sides of 17 high and medium rise blocks, filling cavities while suspended from ropes.

We calculate this free insulation will reduce residents' energy bills by more than £100 a year and cut carbon emissions.

## Easing the squeeze



**Families moving into the ambitious Bradwell Street development will have access to modern, new homes specially designed to meet their needs.**

The new development includes nine large four-bedroom family houses, three of which will have disability adaptations. There will also be three two-bedroom flats and a community space for local residents. Completion is expected by summer.

# Here when yo

It's hard enough having work done in your home without the added pressure of being ill or incapacitated in some way. Here we see how Tower Hamlets Homes helps some residents cope with the disruption of Decent Homes' work.



THH Resident Liaison Officer, Foyso and Team Leader Liz, make life easier for our tenants

**A**ll of us, including dad, wanted to have the new kitchen and bathroom installed, but with dad so sick it wasn't going to happen while he was in the house,' said Poppy, who was keen for the Decent Homes' works to begin in the family home, but was worried about how the disruption would affect her dad.

'Dad has cancer and needs a lot of rest and care. He has a special bed and other medical equipment to help his condition,' she explained.

Clearly, the builders would not be able to work around dad without causing him considerable distress.

And that's where Carol, THH's Resident Liaison Officer, stepped in.

### **They moved Dad and his bed**

'Carol found a place for dad to stay that was just around the corner from our house. She arranged for our kitchen to be packed up. She also got dad's stuff to go with him, including his special bed, which the movers had to dismantle to get out of the house.

'Because she found accommodation so close, it meant that mum and my brothers could live at home while the works were being done, and it was really easy for them to visit dad anytime they wanted.

'As with any big building work, it was dusty and noisy and there were little things that got on our nerves, but Carol made it as smooth as it could be. And now my parents have this new kitchen and bathroom and I think they look great!'

### **We help vulnerable residents**

In fact, as soon as Carol had met Poppy's family she knew they would need help during the works. It also became clear just how beneficial the works would be to this family. A new kitchen and bathroom would certainly help them look after dad, and themselves, with less stress. So Carol set about making it happen.

### **Here to help**

Resident Liaison Team Leader, Liz, says recognising who needs help, and looking after those residents during the works, is crucial:

'This is a once in a lifetime investment in your home. The new facilities can make life so much better for everybody. It's my job to make sure those who need help get it, so they can benefit from the improvements,' she says.

People can need a bit of extra help for all sorts of reasons such as

having a physical or mental illness, a bereavement, money worries or coping with a large family.

Although THH asks our contractors to keep disruption to a minimum, you can't replace toilets or sinks without some disruption.

Most people find it hard to have substantial works done inside their home – but if you are already struggling with something, fear of disruption might mean saying 'No' to the building works.

---

**'The new facilities can make life so much better for everybody. It's my job to make sure those who need help get it, so they can benefit from the improvements.'**

---

### **Extra support is here**

We give extra support where it's needed. We can arrange to pack residents' kitchens and bathrooms and we will also unpack when the works finish. We can also de-clutter and store belongings during the works.

# ou need us

## Respite Care might be needed

On the rare occasions where residents simply cannot remain in their homes during the works, we can help find suitable respite care or accommodation. Those who simply need to get out during the day can be taken to day centres, to return every evening.

Sometimes, finding a suitable solution can take time, but we will do everything we can to help everyone get Decent Homes' work done.

THH chief executive, Gavin Cansfield, says: 'We don't want anyone to miss out on having a new kitchen and bathroom simply because they can't face the work being done. Let's see if we can help make it possible by offering some practical help and please, get in touch if you have concerns about a resident.'

## Here to help

We really are here to help – and for our Decent Homes' team this means tailoring support towards those who need it, to ensure all tenants can benefit from upgraded kitchens and bathrooms.



## Breaking language barriers

Through visiting 8,000 homes we have uncovered a number of residents who have 'slipped through the cracks' of our social care systems and have not been flagged up as needing help. One resident in particular stood out for Foysol, a THH Resident Liaison Officer.

'Our contractor referred me to a resident who had just come out of hospital, and needed support while her kitchen and bathroom were installed. The biggest barrier was that she could not speak English, her first language was Somali – and she was very isolated.'

### Communication is key

'Communication with her was hard, and we didn't get it right at the beginning because we were talking with her through a relative. But when Suad from the Somali Family Intervention Project arrived on the scene we were able to make real changes to improve her life.'

Suad says: 'I met this resident after a neighbour suggested I visit her. I found a woman who was alone and isolated.'

Suad did more than translate, she ensured the resident knew what was happening and how THH could support her, says Foysol.

### Getting this moving

Suad explains: 'I was impressed with the way Foysol and THH responded – the way he made things happen was fantastic. We moved the resident into respite accommodation close to her home. This meant she could keep an eye on her home during the works. Once they were done, THH helped her unpack and return home.'

It's all part of the job, says Foysol: 'I'm really pleased with how we worked together – and I think Suad saved a life. She helped an isolated and lonely person connect with the world and improve her life in the process.'

**'Suad helped an isolated and lonely person connect with the world.'**



Suad from the Somali Intervention Project



# No need to panic over leaseholder bills

If you're finding it tough to manage your Decent Homes' bills we are offering advice and support to help you with the payments.

There will always be a way we can help, whatever your financial circumstances are, as long as you talk to us. We have in-house money help advisers to help you find ways to pay. We've also delayed invoicing you for these works until the works are completed. This means you get an estimated bill, which is much closer to what we will finally invoice you for.

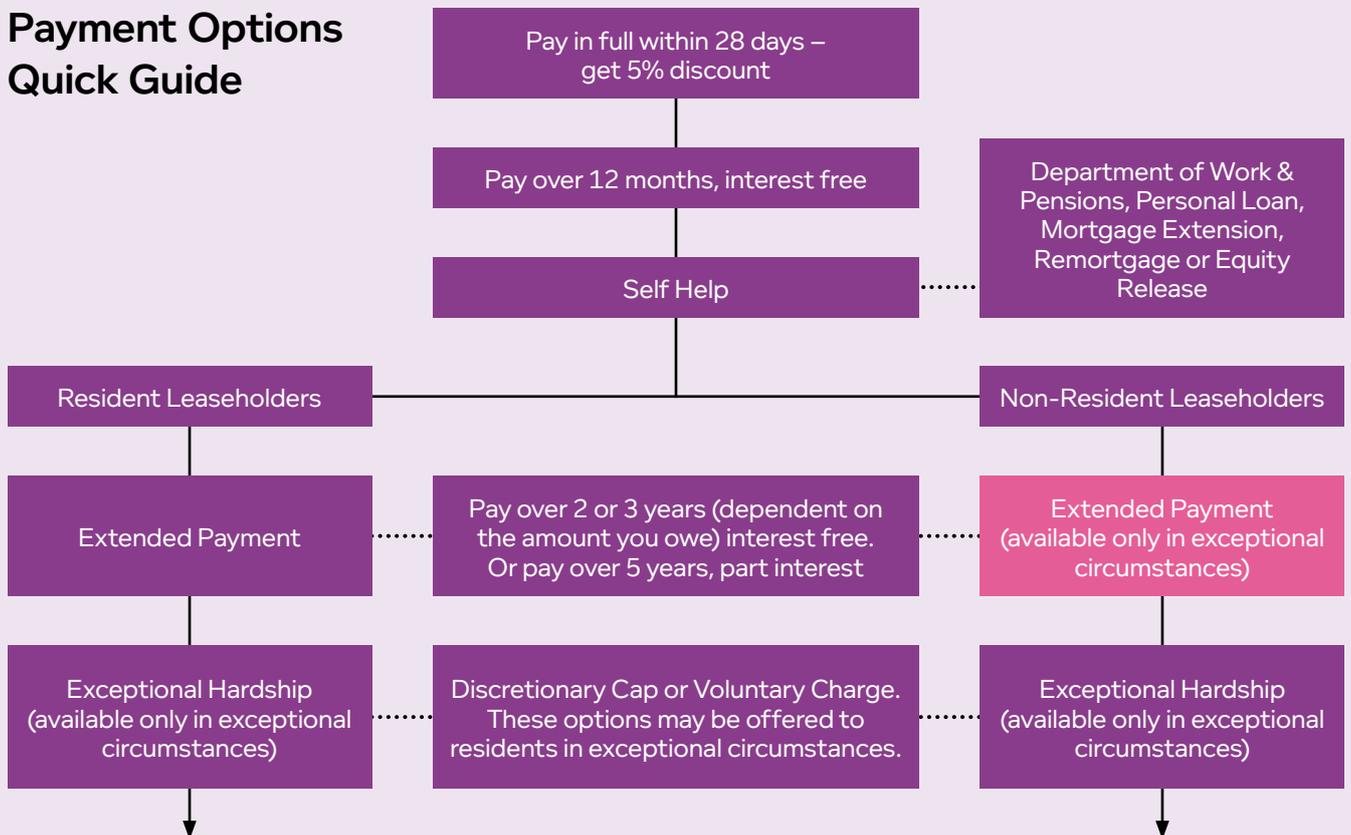
We can discuss options and check you are getting all the benefits you are entitled to, and possibly get you help from the Department for Work and Pensions. There are also free specialist advice agencies that we can put you in touch with. See the payment map (below) and get in touch if you need help.

Whatever your financial circumstances there will be a way we can help.

 020 7364 5015  [contactus@thh.org.uk](mailto:contactus@thh.org.uk)

**Leasehold Surgeries:** Every Thursday 9am-12noon and 1pm-5pm  
Wyn Garrett Residents' Resource Centre, Raynham House, Massingham Street, E1 4EB.

## Payment Options Quick Guide



Talk to us if you've got money problems. Don't ignore the situation. We can help you sort things out.

# Terrified By Your Debts?

## Are you struggling with debt?

When you have debts that you can't repay it can be terrifying and hard to know where to turn.

But many advice agencies in Tower Hamlets will provide free, confidential help.

You might just want to talk to someone or you might want someone to help you make a plan to deal with your debts.

## Don't sit there worrying. ACT NOW.

However bad your situation might be, someone will be able to help you get on top of your debts.

THH can arrange for you to see someone at:

### Account 3

1-9 Birkbeck St, E2 6JY

 [www.account3.org.uk](http://www.account3.org.uk)

### Limehouse Project

791 Commercial Rd, E14 7HG

 [www.limehouseproject.org.uk](http://www.limehouseproject.org.uk)

Local specialist debt advice can also be found at:

### Toynbee Hall

 020 7392 2953

 [www.toynbeehall.org.uk](http://www.toynbeehall.org.uk)

### Island Advice Centre

 020 7987 9379

 [www.island-advice.org.uk](http://www.island-advice.org.uk)

# Get Ready For Universal Credit

Universal Credit (UC) has been introduced in Tower Hamlets for new, single claimants of Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA). By 2017 all claims for Job Seekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance, Income Support, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Housing Benefit will be called Universal Credit.

If you claim any of the allowances above you will eventually be switched to Universal Credit (UC). You will be told before this happens, so don't panic.

## How Can I Prepare For Universal Credit?

 **You MUST have a bank account to receive universal credit.**

If you haven't a bank account you need to get one. You can open a new account with any high street bank or a credit union. Also, if you have a Cash Card Account with the Post Office this can easily be converted to a bank account.

 **Arrange for your rent to be paid directly from your bank account.**

You are responsible for paying your rent from your UC. Failure to pay rent may result in losing your home. It's important that you arrange a direct debit with your bank to pay your rent every month.

 **Learn to use the internet to manage your benefit and your banking.**

Claims for UC must be made online and Job Centres have installed many computers to enable you to do this. THH and the council can provide access to computers in Ideas stores and some community facilities.

## NEED HELP?

THH has a dedicated Universal Credit and Welfare Reform Team to talk you through these changes and explain them to you. We can provide explanations and advice in Bengali.

**If you need help with opening a bank account or any aspect of Universal Credit please call us:**

 020 7364 5015 (option 3)

 [welfare.reform@thh.org.uk](mailto:welfare.reform@thh.org.uk)



# Tackling noise on your estates!

The most common cause of disputes between neighbours is noise nuisance such as DIY, music, children or parties. Last year our Anti-Social Behaviour Team (ASB) investigated 396 reports of noise nuisance.

## What can you do?

Some neighbours are often unaware of the effects they have on their neighbours. If you feel comfortable doing so, choose the right moment to speak to your neighbour politely about the problem.

If you have talked to your neighbour and they are still making a noise you can contact THH.

Yvette Holmes, ASB Manager says: 'We deal with each complaint of noise nuisance on a case by case basis. We'll ask you to keep a detailed record of the noise nuisance. The ASB Officer assigned to your case will review the diary records with you and determine whether it is reasonable or unreasonable noise nuisance and agree the next steps of the investigation.'

Sometimes a visit to your neighbours by the ASB team will be enough to end the noise nuisance, but if it continues we will take more formal action.

## How can you help?

- Tell us your preferred contact times.
- Complete the diary sheets with as much detail as you can.

Call THH 24 hour Anti-social Behaviour reporting line or email us:

 020 7364 5015

 [contactus@thh.org.uk](mailto:contactus@thh.org.uk)



Looking after your estates. Metropolitan Police officers join the THH Anti-Social-Behaviour team on Vehicle Crime Prevention Day in March. Crime around lock ups can cause much noise and disturbance around estates. The police are seen here checking unpaid / unregistered lock up's and garages that may be used for storing stolen bikes and other goods.

# We're here for you

## 'Do you need a bit of extra help? Do you know someone who does?'

We all have moments when we feel we can't cope; usually we are fine, but sometimes we need that little bit of extra support.

People might need extra help for many reasons, for example they may be feeling depressed, have a physical disability, be coping with rent arrears, bereavement, illness or general money worries.

Our officers are keen to provide support or practical assistance to help residents cope around such issues as:

- home adaptations
- help managing money
- changes to benefits
- domestic violence

- repairs and redecorations
- help to get involved in communities
- overcrowding
- hate crime
- home security

### For more information.

 020 7364 5015  
(8.30am to 5.30pm  
Monday-Friday)

 [contactus@thh.org.uk](mailto:contactus@thh.org.uk)

**Here  
to help**

# Nazrul Islam

## Tenant of the Year nominee

Nazrul Islam lives in Bethnal Green, East London, is married with two daughters and two sons. He is one of nine trustees working for the Dorset Community Association, and spends seven days a week helping others in his community. Nazrul was recently shortlisted for the Tenant Participation Advisory Service Tenant of the Year Award 2015.



### Nazrul tell us a bit about yourself

I've lived in Tower Hamlets for twenty years now. I attended Tower Hamlets College in Poplar, gained a Westminster University degree, after which I began work as a housing professional, specialising in rough sleeping and homelessness, in Newham and Haringey. I've spent most of my working life helping people, less fortunate than myself, rebuild their lives.

### You now work for the Dorset Community Association. What made you get into community work?

I live on a small inner city estate with 400 other residents and their families. Like most inner city estates it has its fair share of problems. A lot of young residents lacked direction. Many others felt isolated at home, had few basic skills, and had language difficulties. I wanted to do something to engage those in my community that were socially excluded.

### How did you start?

In 2010, I and a few other like-minded residents set up a charity. We converted the old, disused Dorset Library into a community centre and began opening a few days each week. We offered a small number of activities like coffee mornings, and set up a football club.

It was hard at first, we weren't really sure what we needed to do. I walked for hours delivering leaflets around the estate just to promote the centre. I wanted everyone to know who we were and what we could offer. But it paid off. Five years later, we're thriving: we offer a wide range of activities, seven days a week to local residents.

---

**'By helping people to be active and happy in the community, we believe we can transform lives.'**

---

### What activities does the centre offer?

There's so many! Women's sewing club, welfare benefit drop-in sessions, over-50s lunch club, money mentor classes, and homework club as well as many traditional celebrations like Easter egg hunts, The Big Lunch and Christmas parties. By helping people to be active and happy in the community, we believe we can transform lives.



### What projects are you working on?

We've started working with community leaders Pawla Cottage, former Chair of Columbia TRA and Trevor Wood MBE, Chair of Columbia Market War Memorial Group to honour the victims of the Bethnal Green Tube disaster. I'm very excited about the project.



### Recently you were nominated for Tenant Participation Advisory Service Tenant of the Year award. What was that like?

It was a fantastic. The award ceremony was amazing. I met so many other people who have achieved great things for their communities. We talked about our experiences, and our hopes for the future. The awards were just a small way of saying thank you, and recognising their achievements. It was an honour to take part.

**For more information contact The Dorset Community Association, Diss Street, London E2 7QX.**

 020 7739 9371

 dorsetca@yahoo.com

## Contact details



**Website**  
www.thh.org.uk



**Facebook**  
www.facebook.com/  
towerhamletshomes



**Twitter**  
Follow us @THHomes

Find answers to your questions, learn about our services, find out what we can do for you and view all our leaflets.



**Phone**  
020 7364 5015

**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 us**  
PO 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 and Accessibility

This is Open Door - your borough-wide housing news. If you would like this in large print, audio or your community 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.

**Note: The Housing Office at 542 Roman Road, E3 5ES, will close permanently at 5pm on 26 June, 2015. For information and advice contact, 020 7364 5015.**