Welcome

I’m delighted that the Mayor has written to you about the challenges facing residents in Tower Hamlets. Social housing is going through a period of rapid change and we’re working closely with residents, the council and our partners to respond positively to these challenges.

Residents have helped us to create our THH Business Plan (2016 – 2019). The plan sets out our aims and aspirations for the years ahead – and providing excellent customer service in an efficient way is at the heart of the plan. We’re already reviewing the way we handle your complaints and have set up a Customer Experience Taskforce to improve the quality of services we provide to residents.

You can find out more about the Business Plan in this edition and via our website www.thh.org.uk

One of the key parts of the plan is helping our neighbourhoods to become thriving places. And so I’m pleased to see residents getting involved in projects like the Boundary Estate initiative (featured on our front page) to improve the look, feel and sense of pride on our estates.

One of my concerns is around the potential loss of council housing stock in Tower Hamlets, so I’m encouraged to see exciting plans for four new developments moving forward (see ‘news in brief’).

Finally, I know that many residents are struggling to understand the many changes affecting welfare benefits and I hope you’ll find this feature and our advice around money worries helpful.

Have a great summer.

Susmita Sen
Chief Executive

Mayor John Biggs View – the Housing Act

Housing is the biggest issue facing Tower Hamlets residents – as my postbag and email inbox confirms every day. I spend a lot of time thinking about what the council should do to help.

As Mayor I pledged to build 1,000 new council homes, and to look at helping residents who are being priced out of renting or buying in their local area. I also want to work with housing associations to ensure they are financially sustainable and properly accountable to their residents.

The bad news is that our power to tackle the housing crisis locally is largely determined by the government. The really bad news is that the Housing and Planning Bill is now an Act of Parliament (law). So our task is now much harder.

The Act means we could be forced to sell off much-needed council homes to the highest bidder, end lifetime tenancies, and charge higher rents to council tenants who earn more.

Tower Hamlets Council and other councils and organisations, including Shelter and grassroots tenants groups, are very concerned about the potential impact of the Act. Perhaps the new Mayor of London will offer us some help?

In the meantime we must think about what we can do to improve housing locally. So we are consulting with local people about a new Housing Strategy for Tower Hamlets, which will set out our priorities for housing and how we will achieve them. We are keen to hear from residents about the housing challenges they face – do please contact me with your story at mayor@towerhamlets.gov.uk

John Biggs
Mayor of Tower Hamlets
Important changes to bank details

Earlier this year the council changed its bank account details. This means that if you pay your rent or service charges by Standing Order, Online or Telephone banking (through your own bank), you will need to update your records. The new details for making payments are below:

**Rent payments** (including parking and garages)
- Bank: National Westminster Bank
- Branch: 161 Bow Road, London, E3 2SG
- Account Name: LBTH (rent collection)
- Sort code: 60-03-19
- Account Number: 75667177

**Leasehold service charges**
- Bank: National Westminster Bank
- Branch: 161 Bow Road, London, E3 2SG
- Account Name: LBTH (SC collection)
- Sort code: 60-03-19
- Account Number: 75667266

Watch out for bogus callers

We are aware that bogus callers are operating in our neighbourhoods and may try to trick you to gain entry to your house:
- Always check who’s at the door – don’t open it if you feel anxious
- Always use a spy hole/door chain and ask for ID (genuine tradespeople carry photo ID), keep the door closed while you check it, and call their head office if you’re not sure
- Be wary of anyone who claims they need to get into your home quickly
- If you feel at all unsure, schedule a time for the caller to come back again when a friend or relative can be with you
- Ask us about our Residents’ password security scheme or check on the Repairs section of our website for more details

Beautiful Boundary

In May, local residents from the Boundary Estate, Shoreditch, celebrated the installation of a dozen plant filled bathtubs in an extension of an innovative idea by local resident Philip Green. Planters were placed against exterior windows – combatting ASB and adding more beautiful flowers and greenery to the neighbourhood.

Philip’s idea was brought to life by LBTH’s Community Payback Team, corporate volunteers from Broadridge and THH’s Resident Engagement Team. Our Repairs partner Mears saved the day when the bathtubs for the project were stolen – they rushed in to replace all of the equipment and their staff cheerfully helped construct the flowerbed frames on the day.

Philip said: “Thank you to everyone involved, they’ve made a huge, positive difference to all residents, that will encourage more people to work together as neighbours.”

On the day, Mayor of Tower Hamlets, John Biggs, and THH Chief Executive, Susmita Sen, dropped in to inspect the handywork and thank the volunteers.
The THH Board is vital. It helps us to set out what we want THH to achieve and what our priorities are.

Improving the complaints process

For many residents our complaints handling process is frustrating; sometimes replies are delayed and resolution not as expected. We know that our current process isn’t working as well as it should – and doesn’t provide the service that you expect – or deserve.

We are reviewing the way that we handle your complaints and have established a Customer Experience Taskforce, led by Councillor Pierce, so that we can make improvements which ensure that we do better.

First and foremost we want to make sure we resolve whatever the cause of a complaint is as quickly as possible. We also want to improve the quality of response that you receive. To help make sure we do this we have:

- Made sure all responses are checked for quality by a senior manager
- Asked all staff to make contact with a complainant to make sure we understand exactly what has gone wrong and what we need to do to put things right
- Introduced regular checks of the commitments we make in our responses, so that we make sure that these are followed up
- Introduced more frequent monitoring to ensure responses are sent out in good time

At the heart of our review to improve the process is a promise to improve the service that you receive; we’re making changes because our residents deserve better. We know that sometimes complaints are made when things have gone badly wrong and we want residents to tell us at the start the problem, so that we can put it right before things escalate. If you’ve had bad service, or if things aren’t as they should be, we want to know.
HATE CRIME – don’t suffer in silence

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) covers a wide range of issues – from noise nuisance and vandalism to intimidation and criminal activity. Hate Crime is also considered to be under the umbrella of ASB and is something we take very seriously.

Hate Crime is any incident where you believe you or someone you know has been targeted because of race/ethnicity, religion/belief, gender, disability, age or sexual orientation and any other actual (or assumed) difference.

Some examples of Hate Crime include physical violence, verbal abuse, hate mail and threatening or intimidating behaviour.

Hate Crime can have a severe and prolonged effect on both individuals and their communities; often people feel that they cannot report hate crime for fear that any abuse will get worse, or because they believe that nothing will be done to tackle the problem. We will always take your complaints seriously and they will be dealt with sensitively and in total confidence.

Forms of Hate Crime can include:
- Verbal abuse (name calling, derogatory remarks)
- Physical violence (spitting, pushing, assault)
- Damage to property
- Offensive graffiti
- Threatening behaviour
- Intimidation
- Threatening calls or mail
- Desecration of graveyards

Tackling Hate Crime is a top priority for both THH and the council and we take all reports seriously. If you feel you are the victim of Hate Crime contact us as soon as possible – we will work with our partners, including the police, council and community safety officers to make sure the matter is dealt with.

You can report Hate Crime to our ASB team via the methods below:
- To report anti-social behaviour call 020 7364 5015
- Call 999 in an emergency.
- Police non-emergency number dial 101
- Victim Support Serious & Violent Crime Service 020 7364 7797/7970

Need to pay a Parking notice?

Did you know that the number for NSL (our parking contractor) is a general service number, and not a premium rate number? Calls to 08433 571 555 cost a single 7p connection, and then 7p per minute at any time from a landline. Calls from mobiles and other providers vary.

Are you protected?

At some time you may be unlucky enough to suffer a disaster which damages the contents of your home. THH strongly advises all tenants and leaseholders to take out home insurance in some form – so that you are protected, should the worst happen. You can do this by making your own arrangements, or you can join the council’s new home contents insurance scheme, with Crystal Insurance.

You can find out more on our website or pick up an application form at your local housing office. For more information or to apply email insurance@towerhamlets.gov.uk or call Crystal Insurance direct on 0845 601 7007.
Changes to Welfare Benefits

Backdating of Housing Benefit
Since 1 April 2016 the period for which a claim for Housing Benefit can be backdated has been reduced from six months to one month.

You can get backdated Housing Benefit for one month if you can show you have a good reason for not claiming earlier. You also have to show that you were entitled to Housing Benefit throughout the period of backdating.

Changes to Non-dependant rates
From 1 April 2016 the government has increased the amount of Non-Dependant deductions it could take from your Housing Benefit.

How does a Non-Dependant affect my Housing Benefit?
Your Housing Benefit can be reduced by an amount called a non-dependant deduction if someone else living in your home could help pay the rent. The deduction is based on their income and will be made from your weekly Housing Benefit.

These deductions are fixed amounts which apply even if the Non-Dependant pays you nothing at all. There are some exemptions, for example if the non-dependant is a full time student or of they are aged under 25 and receiving Income Support, Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA).

Who is a Non-Dependant?
A Non-Dependant is an adult aged over 18 living in your home who is not:
- Your husband, wife or partner; or
- A child that you receive Child Benefit for.

The Housing and Planning Act 2016

The Housing and Planning Act 2016 (new laws brought in by the government) covers a wide range of changes and three of these changes, listed below, could have a big impact on THH and its tenants. The details still need to be finalised by government ministers and we will keep you updated.

Pay to Stay
Pay to Stay will mean that tenants on higher incomes will have to pay higher rent.

Households with a total income above £31,000pa (£40,000 in London) will be required to pay higher rents from April 2017.

Tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit will be exempt from the policy. All other tenants will have to declare their total household income to their local council so that the council can work out how much extra rent they will need to pay.

High Value Voids (empty properties)
The Act extends Right to Buy to Housing Association tenants. To help pay for this the Act requires that all councils have to consider selling off their high value properties when they become empty. The government will tell the council how much it has to pay each year.

Phasing out lifetime tenancies
Councils will no longer be able to offer lifetime tenancies. New tenancies can be offered for a fixed term of up to 10 years for those with a disability and for those with families (up to the 19th birthday of the youngest child).

For more details about changes to Welfare Benefits, visit our website or contact one of our dedicated Welfare advisers: Email Welfare.Reform@towerhamlets.gov.uk or phone 020 7364 5015 (option 3, option 3).
Money Worries? We’re Here to Help

Did you know that THH provides a free referral service to our local partner, Account3? Account3 can help you manage your money better and offers advice on a range of issues including welfare benefits, planning your money and payment plans. The service is completely FREE and totally confidential.

Advisers at Account3 are independent of THH and will provide you with friendly and impartial advice. Open Door spoke to a senior adviser, Peter (above), at Account3 to find out how the service works and what people can expect if they are referred.

What kind of help does Account3 offer?
We can sit down with you and look at anything that might be worrying you - for example, if you are having trouble managing your money, paying rent or if you need help with welfare benefits.

Why should I think about getting advice?
We work with local people to make sure that they don’t lose their homes or face court action over money or benefit issues; we know that problems around money can be worrying but we can almost always help – and the sooner you come to us, the quicker we can stop things from getting worse.

What happens at an appointment?
We talk through the problems that people have and work together to try to find a solution. For example, we can help to arrange payment plans, stop eviction or court action, help with benefit claims and job training. Everything is totally confidential. We can talk to organisations like THH on your behalf if you want us to but we won’t share anything you tell us with anyone else.

Customers who’ve benefited from the team’s help have said:
‘So grateful for such vital services’
‘I am very happy that I am able to come and have very helpful staff be able to deal with my housing problems’

Contact us for advice and a referral:
Email Welfare.Reform@towerhamlets.gov.uk or phone 020 7364 5015 (option 3, option 3).

Pay your rent by Direct Debit and win £1,000!

Switch your housing rent payments to Direct Debit and WIN £1,000 of shopping vouchers.

THH is taking part in a national campaign run by Direct Debit; we are joining other housing providers across the country to enter all new and existing Direct Debit payers into a prize draw, where five lucky people will win £1,000 Love2Shop vouchers. With the introduction of Universal Credit the way in which you receive your Housing Benefit will change, and you will be responsible for paying your rent direct to THH. Switching to Direct Debit means that your rent will be paid on-time, without having to worry.

To sign up – pull out, fill in and return the leaflet attached to the centre of Open Door; alternatively call us on 020 7364 5015.
Finishing touches

Our Decent Homes programme is coming to an end. In just 5 years we’ve worked on almost 12,000 homes and brought almost 7,500 homes up to the Decent Homes standard.

Finishing touches to blocks we are currently working on will be completed this summer.

While we’re proud of what’s been achieved we know that it hasn’t been easy for our residents.

Construction work has often been noisy and disruptive. We’ve really appreciated how patient residents have been while our contractors have fitted new kitchens, bathrooms, roofs and windows.

Learning from our mistakes

We know it hasn’t always been easy. We’ve talked with residents, worked closely with our Board members and local ward Councillors to review our work and make sure we learn from our mistakes.

Here are some highlights:

- **You said:** Leaseholder consultation could be better.  
  **We did:** We changed the way we talk with all residents before we start works. Holding events where leaseholders can talk with specialist staff, one to one, about why we’re carrying out the work and how much they will have to contribute to it.

- **You said:** We could improve the way we communicate with you about the works.  
  **We did:** Our contractors now send regular newsletters updating residents about work and use text messages to let residents know about appointments.

- **You said:** We should offer better repayment options for leaseholders.  
  **We did:** We talked to the council and negotiated some of the best repayment options for leaseholders.

Your 12 month warranty

All of our Decent Homes work comes with a 12 month warranty – this includes kitchens and bathrooms as well as windows and doors. If something goes wrong and you’re not happy with the works – please contact us and we’ll get the contractor back to put it right.

Your new kitchen and bathroom comes with a 12 month warranty. If there is a problem:

1. Call us on 020 7364 5015.
2. Tell us you have recently had Decent Homes work done.
3. Our contractor will fix this as part of their contract.

Decent Homes, Decent Jobs, Decent Future.

RESPECT – A TWO WAY STREET

At Tower Hamlets Homes, all of our staff and contractors are expected to treat you with courtesy at all times – we expect that you will, in turn, treat our staff and contractors with respect. We know that sometimes difficult and frustrating situations can arise, but abuse – verbal or physical – against our staff or contractors will not be tolerated and may be a breach of your tenancy conditions.
YOU’RE HIRED!
Helping residents to achieve their potential

FACT BOX

We’ve helped to create more than 132 apprenticeships for local young people, including:

- **52** trades apprentices
- **35** site and office apprentices
- **36** customer service apprentices

Almost half the apprentices have been offered full-time work or further training. Thirty two per cent of apprentices are women and more than half come from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

What’s Next – More homes to be proud of

Even though Decent Homes is ending - we are continuing to invest in the homes we manage.

We’ll be using the knowledge, and experience gained from the Decent Homes programme to improve how we work:

- **Working locally** – By working in smaller, local areas our contractors are more cost effective - which means we get better value for money.
- **Involving more residents** – we’re tailoring our consultation approach to each individual block – this will help us to increase the number of residents we engage.
- **Consulting with residents early** – by listening to residents early in the planning stage, we know from experience that this increases satisfaction with major works.

Look out for more details about the programme on our website.

SCAFFOLD SAFETY

We need to use scaffold to do most of the works to the outside of your homes.

Be safe. Please do not trespass on the scaffolding or allow any of your family members to do so. It is very dangerous and could result in injury or death.

You can keep your home and neighbours safe by calling us on 020 7364 5015 if you see anything suspicious on the scaffolding.

If you notice unauthorised people on the scaffolding out of office hours, please call the Police on 101.

As a tenant or resident of THH, we expect that you will:
- Respect the right of your neighbours to enjoy their homes in peace
- Be aware that your behaviour may affect others
- Treat your neighbours as you expect to be treated yourself
- Not use abusive language when dealing with our staff or our contractors
- Not use threats of violence against any member of staff or contractors – any such threats will not be tolerated under any circumstances. We will take action if such incidents occur

Please treat others as you would expect to be treated yourself.

“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.”

Mohammed - Business Administration Apprentice

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Please treat others as you would expect to be treated yourself.
Tackling condensation

Condensation happens in all homes when warm, moist air meets a cold surface and tiny water droplets develop. The more moisture in the air, the more water is produced. Everyday activities, such as cooking, washing clothes and bathing create moisture in the air.

Signs of condensation:
- Black mould in the corners of rooms, behind furniture and in cupboards
- Walls, ceilings and cold surfaces ‘sweat’ with moisture
- Water appears on the inside of windows
- Clothes in cupboards and drawers have a musty smell and mildew on them

Don’t let the problem get worse:
Condensation and damp can lead to:
- Serious damage to your home, like rotting windows and damaged electrics
- Existing health conditions like asthma and bronchitis getting worse

What you can do:
- Remove small amounts of mould with mould and mildew cleaning products (available from supermarkets and DIY shops)
- Wipe down the inside of windows if they become wet and keep trickle vents at the top of windows open
- When cooking, cover pans with lids and keep the kitchen door closed; make sure a window is open or the extractor fan is on
- If you have the heating on high, try to open windows now and again to ventilate the room
- If you have a thermostat, never turn it off completely (use a low setting during the night to stop water droplets from forming)

When we can help:
THH tenants have certain responsibilities around the maintenance of their homes. If you follow the advice above, you should be able to keep any condensation and mould under control yourself.

We will not carry out works:
- On small areas of mould (smaller than one square metre)
- If you only have small patches of mould growth, you will need to remove this yourself

We will consider carrying out works if:
- You have bad condensation and mould (like that shown in the picture) in a living room or bedroom, bathroom or kitchen
- You are a tenant, have followed the advice above and still have very bad condensation and mould

If you’re still having problems:
- If the mould covers an area of at least two walls we can arrange for a contractor to carry out an initial inspection.

Remember there’s a big difference between mould caused by condensation and mould caused by damp – for an in-depth explanation of the differences and a guide to identifying rising and penetrating damp, visit our website.

Report a repair –
available 24 hours, every day. Phone 020 7364 5015 or 0800 376 1637 (free from landlines, call charges from mobiles may vary). Phone between 8:30am to 5:30pm to report a repair. Outside of these hours we only take calls about emergencies – if your repair is not an emergency, you will be asked to call back.

Email repairs@thh.org.uk (not for emergency repairs) or visit our website to report a repair online.

Our Repairs Service Development Group is made up of staff and residents, and works to highlight repairs issues. If you have any suggestions about what we should cover, get in touch: residentengagement@thh.org.uk or call 020 7364 5015.
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 helping us improve our services. Read more below...

Be Inspired

We are partnering with The Girls’ Network to offer a mentoring programme for girls and young women aged 14-18. We will match you with an inspiring female mentor to help you grow, become more confident, and make a positive difference to your life. The programme will offer you 1:1 help and support – so that you can fulfil your potential and achieve your goals.

For more information, email: residentengagement@thh.org.uk (Places are limited).

Your neighbourhood needs you!

At THH we’re always looking for tenants and residents to get involved – we know that we can improve services for the better with your input and experience. If you’d like to be kept in the loop about opportunities, email us at residentengagement@thh.org.uk and we will add you to our engagement register – we’ll contact you direct when we have opportunities that we think you may be interested in.

One of our Resident Panel members, Mahbub, talked to us about why he got involved:

Why did you sign up and what have you gained?
I wanted to be active in the community and give something back. It’s given me a better idea of what THH actually delivers. I’ve also met people who have skills different to my own – and I’ve learned from them; it’s also a great way to boost your confidence and try new things.

Why should other residents get involved?
For anyone who’s interested – come on board and bring your own knowledge and expertise; your perspective brings a really valuable contribution – whether good or bad – we’re looking positively to see if we can make a difference – and I really think anyone can!

Opening doors to employment

Are you interested in gaining a qualification in childcare, whilst also improving your basic Maths and English skills? The ChildCarePlus training programme – run by the Limehouse Project, in partnership with THH, is a 12 week training programme focused on giving women the skills needed to get into employment – with the added option of being able to enrol onto a vocational childcare training programme on completion of the course.

The training programme offers 1:1 support throughout and focuses on key work skills – like English language and numeracy. Once the 12 week course is completed, applicants have the option to start a Level 2 qualification in Early Years childcare.

Shajna, a local resident, said: “I found that the 1:1 support given to me was invaluable and helped build my self-belief; my confidence has grown and my skills improved.”

The course is open to women 16+ in Tower Hamlets, for more information email residentengagement@thh.org.uk or re.begum@limehouseproject.org.uk
Here to Help

War-sidahan waa 'Albaab Furan' (Open Door) akhbaar guryo guud ahaan degmadaaad 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.

Report a repair or check the progress of a repair. Someone is available 24 hours, every day.

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repairs@thh.org.uk
(not for emergency repairs)

For help or advice on anti-social behaviour.

**Phone**
020 7364 5015
Call 999 in an emergency. Police non-emergency number dial 101.

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

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**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.

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

Idea Store, Watney Market
260 Commercial Road, London, E1 2FB

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— 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