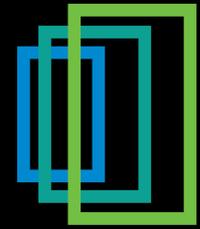


**Tower
Hamlets
Homes**

opendoor



WINTER 2016 THH.ORG.UK

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Tower Hamlets Homes

WINTER 2016

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Have your story featured in opendoor

If you've got a story you'd like to share – whether it's a personal achievement, a successful event or a fun-filled fundraiser – we'd like to hear from you. We want to see inspiring residents' stories in opendoor, so get in touch.

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Win £50

Answer a few simple questions online about this issue of **opendoor** and you could win a £50 Love2shop voucher.

We've made a few changes to **opendoor** and want to know what you think – simply go to the link below and you could be in the money!

thh.org.uk/opendoorsurvey

Swapping vandalism for veg

Green-fingered residents set up a community food garden in a disused and vandalised playground. Residents of the Clichy Estate reclaimed the disused play area to encourage people to get out in the fresh air and meet their neighbours. The Rupali Food Garden was started with help from our resident engagement team and our repairs partner, Mears. Interested in setting up your own urban oasis? Email: residentengagement@thh.org.uk for more info.



Making it happen

Our Inspiring Communities Fund helped over 24 groups to run community-focused projects across the borough. They include the Cook and Eat project featured on page 10. Keep your eyes peeled for the next round of funding in 2017.



Pretty in pink

Caretakers across our estates wore pink in October as part of a THH staff initiative to raise funds for Breast Cancer Now. £600 was raised for the cause as staff cooked up a storm and paraded in pink.



Free courses for residents

Want to learn new skills? Our resident training programme covers a wide range of topics – from working in the community to learning more about your finances, there's something for everyone. All courses are free to THH residents and take place across the borough until June 2017. Visit thh.org.uk or email residentengagement@thh.org.uk for more details.

Free bulk rubbish collection

The council has introduced a free collection service for bulk rubbish. Each household is now entitled to two free collections per year with up to five items per collection. Call Streetline on 020 7364 5004. Alternatively, Homestore collect good-quality furniture free of charge. Email homestore@qsa.org.uk or call 020 8519 6264.

Housing fraud

Tenancy fraud deprives those who are in genuine need of a home. You can help stop it. Thanks to our Key Amnesty at the beginning of the year, we housed nine families from our waiting list. You can report tenancy fraud in total confidence by emailing socialhousing-fraud@towerhamlets.gov.uk or calling Freephone 0800 528 0294.

Data matching

THH is taking part in the National Fraud Initiative. This means that we must provide information about our residents, staff and suppliers to the Cabinet Office; they can then compare it to information held by councils and the government to help detect and prevent fraud. For more info go to www.towerhamlets.gov.uk

A new deal ahead.

With a crucial year ahead, **opendoor** spoke to Tower Hamlets leaseholder and board vice-chair Claire Tuffin about the key issues for residents.

'Building services around the customer' is a phrase that comes up time and again in Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) – but now it has taken on a whole new meaning.

A new mayor, new board and new management team are determined to put in place a new deal for tenants and leaseholders – getting services right first time, at the right price and accessible in new ways.

All this is in the context of changes to tenants' rights and welfare reform, and the answers must be provided within the year.

"I want to see excellent services – and by that I mean really excellent services. There's been dissatisfaction for too long," Claire concedes.

"We've been through changes. We've recruited a new management team: we've four new councillors on the board, plus two new independents and we've just appointed a leaseholder member."

The board's next task is hugely important to the long-term future for residents – not only must they transform services but they've got to do it in double-quick time.

Claire said: "We've got the one per cent rent reduction, pay to stay, universal credit – all of these things will affect our income. And while we need to be leaner, we must also have a greater impact. We've got to provide services in a more thoughtful and intelligent way.

"An example is our new deal for leaseholders and how they pay for our major works. Decent Homes was a huge programme done very quickly and we didn't always get it right. We learned a lot

that we can build into future programmes. We've since sought the views of leaseholders. Now there's a lot more lead-in time on works, more information and more options on how to pay.

"In October we took over responsibility for repair calls from the council so that people can speak to us directly. Over the coming year we'll look at every service to see how we can make life easier for residents.

"I want to see core services improve as well as look at new ways to deliver them, such as online and via social media. While it's true that I want

to see more people getting services digitally, there's work to be done to understand where our most vulnerable residents are so we can get them to the right support services if they are struggling.

"There's also a real drive to work with partners on things like antisocial behaviour. We can't do everything on our own, but we can achieve more together. We're targeting the areas where problems exist at the times they occur. We're working with the council, the police and of course residents to build cases and take robust action."

Claire concluded: "We're on a journey to be better and we'd like residents' help. Tell us when we don't get it right, but please be open to different and new ways of doing things. We are seeing improvements already, but these changes will take some time. While the pace of change may not feel fast enough for some of you, we are determined to get this right. By next summer you should start to feel real change and improvement in our services."

The board is set to implement a series of service reviews, including:

- Putting more resources into tackling anti-social behaviour and taking more enforcement action.
- Checking more repairs to improve the quality and satisfaction with the repairs service.
- Improving the package of leaseholder services.
- Improving the website so that you can get more services online.
- Making sure our call centre staff have the right information so that more of your enquiries are answered correctly first time.



"We'll look at every service to see how we can make life easier for residents."



Chief Executive Susmita Sen (left) on patrol with ASB staff and police.

special
feature

Tougher action

If you are a resident affected by anti-social behaviour (ASB), you don't need reminding how badly it can affect you and your neighbourhood. We're determined to act against ASB.

With our partners, the police and the council, we've agreed new ways to provide a service that will crack down on ASB and the people causing it. Some of these changes have already started, like the new police ASB team that operates on evenings and weekends during peak times for ASB. Others will begin next year.

Susmita Sen, THH Chief Executive, says: "Some of our residents endure awful situations caused by ASB. We're not promising we can solve these problems overnight but we are making improvements that we hope will make a noticeable difference."

Some of what we're planning in 2017

Better communications. The first call of complaint will be answered directly by a trained ASB liaison officer based in the ASB team. Where there is an ongoing case, residents involved will be given regular updates. Our aim is to start this by mid-2017.

Residents will be told if ASB and criminal activity is increasing in or around their block, and will be kept informed about what is being done to stop it.

Legal action on serious ASB. THH already takes legal action against those committing serious ASB, but added to this will be an extra focus on leaseholders or their sub-tenants who break the terms of their lease.

Diverting young people. There has been a rise in some areas of street-gang culture. Experienced professionals will be working with up to 50 19 to 26 years olds to motivate them to alter their lifestyles which currently influence younger people, leading to more ASB.

We will keep you updated in coming issues of Open Door as more changes come into force.

Please report ASB

We want your help in tackling ASB and encourage you to report problems. We know that people can be reluctant, but your calls will be treated in strict confidence and you can remain anonymous. Call the police on non-emergency number 101 when an



on on

ASB

incident is happening or call us on 5015. Examples of things that can be reported to 101:

- Buying, selling or using drugs.
- Vandalism.
- Inconsiderate or inappropriate use of vehicles.
- Harassment and verbal abuse.

Always call 999 if you or another person is in immediate danger.

Joint working brings justice. It can be frustrating for residents when ASB is happening on their doorstep and dealing with it seems to be taking too long. But it can take time to gather the evidence and build the case to produce a successful outcome.

Drug dealer jailed. A 20 year old drug dealer and a large, intimidating group were hanging around the Cleveland Estate, Bethnal Green causing a disturbance to residents. The information and evidence given to THH's ASB team and the police led to THH obtaining a successful civil injunction with power of arrest and a two year exclusion order. Following several breaches of the order and the possession of drugs, the dealer was arrested and jailed for six months.



Tower Hamlets Police Borough Commander **Detective Chief Superintendent Sue Williams** believes partnership working with THH is key to cracking ASB. She says: "We can't tackle ASB alone which is why it's really important that we work with partners like THH to get results. THH often has crucial information that helps us to target patrols and resources. Our findings from these are shared with THH so they can build strong cases for court."

Our caretakers are out and about in all sorts of weather working hard to keep your neighbourhoods clean and tidy. They know residents on their patch better than most other THH staff, and regularly go the extra mile to help them out.

Getting to know each other is a two-way street so if you see your caretaker, take a moment to say hello and chat about what is happening on your estate. That way you can help each other out, like Longnor Estate's Joan and Mark.

Good fella. Joan Burton is the chair of Longnor Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) and gives caretaker Mark Hunter a perfect 10.

"Mark is a good fella, very obliging and reliable. If I say so-and-so needs help, he'll go and see them and looks out for the elderly people on the estate. He does things he doesn't need to do, like buying a paper

in his lunch break for someone who is unable to get to the shops. If he knows someone has dumped something in the street, he'll take it back to them and tell them to ring the right number to get it removed. All these things make a difference to how you feel about where you live. You can have a laugh and a joke with him too."

Eyes and ears. Mark Hunter is the caretaker for the Longnor Estate, Bethnal Green which has 130 properties.

"Longnor is a nice little estate, and people like Joan really care about their homes. I take pride in my job and want to keep the residents happy. They're my eyes and ears, picking up on things like anti-social behaviour and who's dumping rubbish so I can deal with it in the right way. I do keep an eye on the older people and they appreciate it. Good communication and respecting each other – that's the key."



Get Smart with smart meters



Did you know that smart meters are the new generation of gas and electricity meters, and will soon replace traditional meters in homes?

Smart meters use wireless technology to send meter readings to your supplier. They also send live information to a portable display in your home. This means no more estimated readings as you get to see exactly how much gas and electricity you're using by the minute. With a smart meter you'll be able to work out which appliances are using the most energy and even see the difference it makes when you remember to turn the lights out.

Topping up. Smart meter prepay customers can top up their credit whenever and wherever they want to using an app, online or on the phone, as well as in the shops.

All smart meters are free, and you can contact your energy supplier to find out when you can get one fitted. You don't need to get our permission to get one fitted. Without one you won't be able to benefit from accurate (rather than estimated readings) energy readings or having a live energy-use display.

Everyone in Britain will be offered a smart meter by 2020. You can get more information from smartenergygb.org

Step on the gas



Faulty gas fires, boilers and cookers are deadly. They can cause gas leaks, fires and explosions. That's why it's important to make sure your gas appliances are checked every year.

Gas checks for tenants. We have to check the gas appliances in our rented homes every year. Before your annual service is due, we'll write to you with an appointment. Your tenancy agreement says that you must let our engineer into your home to do this. Please make sure someone is at home for the appointment.

Gas checks for leaseholders. If you own your home it's your responsibility to make sure your gas appliances are safe. We recommend you get them checked each year by an engineer listed on the Gas Safe Register. If you rent out your property then you must by law arrange a gas safety check every year.

Repairs helpline

Tel: 020 7364 5015

Tel: 0800 376 1637 (Freephone)

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

Phone between 8:30am and 5:30pm to report a repair.

Outside of these hours we only take calls about emergencies.

Cook and Eat course cuts calories and cash

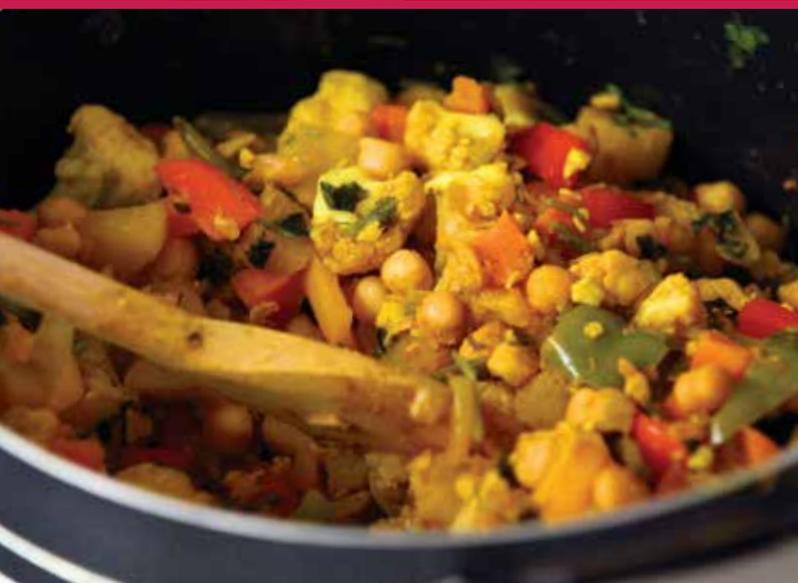
Parkview Estate resident Shamsia Begum applied to our Inspiring Communities Fund to be able to establish an innovative project in her local community centre – Cook and Eat.

Shamsia said: "I moved to the area in 2010 and was sad to see the lack of activities happening in the community centre – I wanted to see if I could make a difference. With help from THH's engagement team we decided to trial the Cook and Eat programme. The sessions encourage people to come together to prepare cheap and healthy food.

"As well as giving people the opportunity to make new friends, they also learn about healthy eating. Some people see healthy food as expensive – all the recipes we use are cheap to make.

"We provide useful tips and advice about cooking for your family on a budget. We talk about replacing salt and sugar with herbs and spices and reducing oil use. We also emphasise the importance of trying to include 'five a day' in your diet by using different types of vegetables in traditional dishes.

"It's been great to see people make new friends and embrace a new diet. We've run six sessions of Cook and Eat and hope to do more in the New Year." For more information on our Inspiring Communities Fund email residentengagement@thh.org.uk



Try this recipe for a healthy 'five a day' raita.

Ingredients: 250ml low fat yogurt

1 red pepper

1 green pepper

1 medium carrot

1 bag of spinach (washed and chopped)

2 large tomatoes

1 cucumber

1 red onion

1 bunch of coriander (washed and chopped)

1tsp of cumin

1 clove of garlic crushed

Juice of 1 lemon

...and some black pepper

Dressing: Add the crushed garlic, cumin and black pepper to the yogurt and mix well. Add the lemon juice and a sprinkle of black pepper. Let the flavours infuse.

Chop and dice the vegetables into a large bowl then combine with spinach and coriander. Add the dressing and make sure it's mixed in well with the vegetables. Serve with wholemeal wraps or as a side dish.

Fight the fatberg with perfect pipes



Our DIY expert, **Ryan Whittington**, gives advice on how to keep pipes in tip-top order.

'Fat, oil, coffee grounds and food waste are the enemy of perfect pipes,' says Ryan. 'They clog and congeal, blocking the flow of water. Avoid putting them down the drain.'

Ryan's advice. Scrape food waste into the bin or wipe off with paper. Cooled fat and oil can go into containers like empty tins or cartons and be added to rubbish. If you have a garden you can scatter coffee grounds to prevent slugs.

Cleaning pipes regularly helps. Most store-bought drain cleaners will dissolve soap scum and hair but old-style remedies work too. Pour a handful of baking powder down the plug hole and add equal parts vinegar. Leave for 30 minutes and then run hot water to clear. Vinegar is an excellent cleaner containing acetic acid, and baking soda is great for absorbing bad smells.

Fight the fatberg. Even if fat makes it through your pipes, it will still land in the sewers where it can form huge blocks called fatbergs. Just like icebergs they can wreak

titanic damage, growing to the size of a double decker bus, causing floods and breaking sewer pipes. Watch our fat busting film at [youtube/towerhamletshomes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=towerhamletshomes)

What do to if there's a leak. If you're getting a leak from someone else's flat, tell us as soon as you can. If the leak is coming from a tenant's flat, we'll arrange a repair to stop it.

If the leak is coming from a leaseholder's flat, we'll contact them straight away and remind them of their obligation to carry out the repairs promptly.

Leaseholders can check out their repair responsibilities at [thh.org.uk/leaseholders-repairs](https://www.thh.org.uk/leaseholders-repairs). Repairs helpline: 0800 376 1637 (free from landlines) or 0207 364 5015.

Get insured. It's also important to have contents insurance to cover things like damage to furniture, fire or theft. We've arranged an affordable insurance policy for tenants with Crystal Insurance. Find out more at [thh.org.uk/homeinsurance](https://www.thh.org.uk/homeinsurance) or call the council's insurance section on 020 7364 6568. Alternatively contact Crystal Insurance on 0345 450 7286.

Watch our other helpful DIY videos at [thh.org.uk/diывideos](https://www.thh.org.uk/diывideos)

Keeping up with the changes

Two recent Acts of Parliament are making major changes to housing law and welfare benefits. The Housing and Planning Act became law on 12 May 2016 and the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 in March 2016. They could have a big impact on some of our tenants. Here is a brief description of the main changes.

Housing: lifetime tenancies

New tenants will no longer be offered lifetime tenancies. Instead, there will be fixed-term tenancies of between two and 10 years. Families with a child under nine can keep their tenancy until the child's 19th birthday.

If a tenant no longer needs as many bedrooms at the end of the fixed-term tenancy – for example, if older children have left home – they may be offered a home with fewer bedrooms. This will not affect existing tenants.

Transfers

Succession on the death of the tenant will be restricted to spouses or civil partners. These will be fixed-term tenancies, though local authorities will have the discretion to grant another lifetime tenancy.

If tenants are forced to move, say because of a regeneration scheme, they will retain their existing tenancy rights.

Right to Buy

The Right-to-Buy scheme will be extended to housing association residents. The start date of this legislation has not been finalised, but THH and the council recognise that, in a time of great need for social housing, this will mean fewer homes for local residents to rent.

You can find out more detailed information and how it affects Tower Hamlets residents at thh.org.uk/benefits



Pay to Stay

The government has scrapped plans to force higher earning tenants to pay more in rent (Pay to Stay).

Welfare benefits

These benefit changes came into effect from April 2016.

Backdating housing benefit

Housing benefit claims will only be backdated for up to four weeks. Previously it could be backdated for up to six months.

Benefit and tax credit rates

These will be frozen for four years and not increased for working-age benefits. The freeze excludes people on disability, pensioner and statutory benefits.

Removing the family premium in housing benefit

The weekly family premium of £17.45 makes up part of the housing benefit award and is paid to couples and lone parents with dependent children. It was removed from new claimants in April.

Universal credit

The work allowance in universal credit (the amount you can earn without your benefit being affected) was reduced. For disabled people and people with children who have housing costs it was reduced to £192 per month; for those without housing costs to £397 per month.

It has been abolished altogether for non-disabled claimants without children, which means their benefit will be reduced as soon as they start to earn.

If you're going abroad

Housing benefit and pension credit payments will now be limited to four weeks for claimants who go outside Great Britain.

The information in this article is correct at the time of writing – November 2016. For up-to-date information and to find out how the changes may affect you, visit tth.org.uk/benefits

You can also contact one of our dedicated welfare reform advisers.

Email: Welfare.reform@tth.org.uk

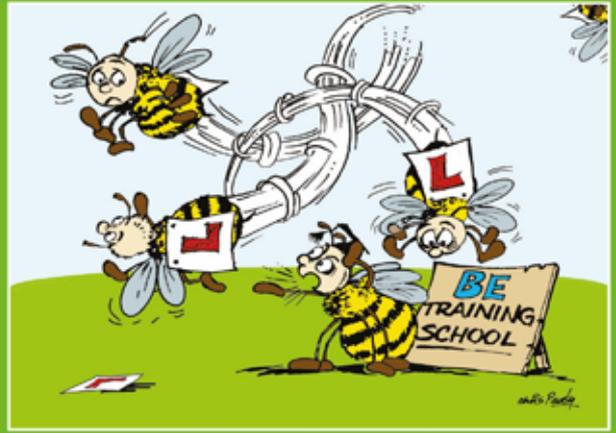
or phone 020 7364 5015 (option 3, option 3).

find out more

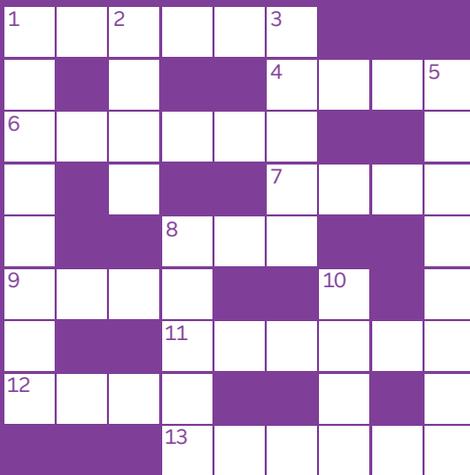


Spot the difference

There are 6 differences between these two pictures – can you spot them?



Crossword



Across

- 1 Cruel (6)
- 4 Spoil completely (4)
- 6 Farm animals (6)
- 7 Used for washing (4)
- 8 International code word for 'help' (3)
- 9 Letters (4)
- 11 Forgive (6)
- 12 Jot down (4)
- 13 Bird trained to carry messages (6)

Down

- 1 Rare (8)
- 2 You might fly one on a string (4)
- 3 When you put your clothes on (5)
- 5 His empress was Josephine (8)
- 8 Slumber (5)
- 3 Confident (4)

True or false?

- 1 A giraffe can lick its own ears
- 2 An ostrich's eye is bigger than its brain
- 3 The fastest creature on Earth is the cheetah



Wordsearch

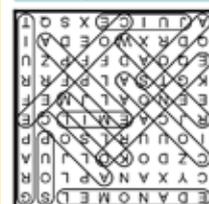
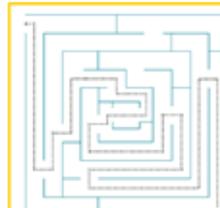
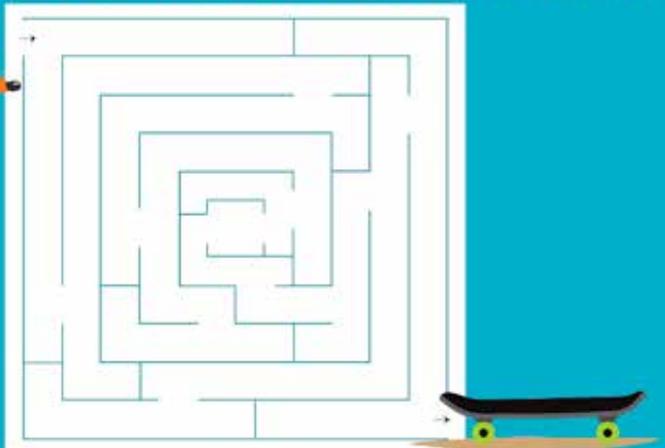
Hidden in the grid are the names of things you can drink. Can you find them all?

- APPLE
- COCOA
- COFFEE
- COLA
- GRAPEFRUIT
- JUICE
- LEMONADE
- LIME
- MILK
- ORANGE
- SODA
- SOUP
- WATER



Maze

Fizz the fox has lost his skateboard, can you draw a path through the maze to help him find it?



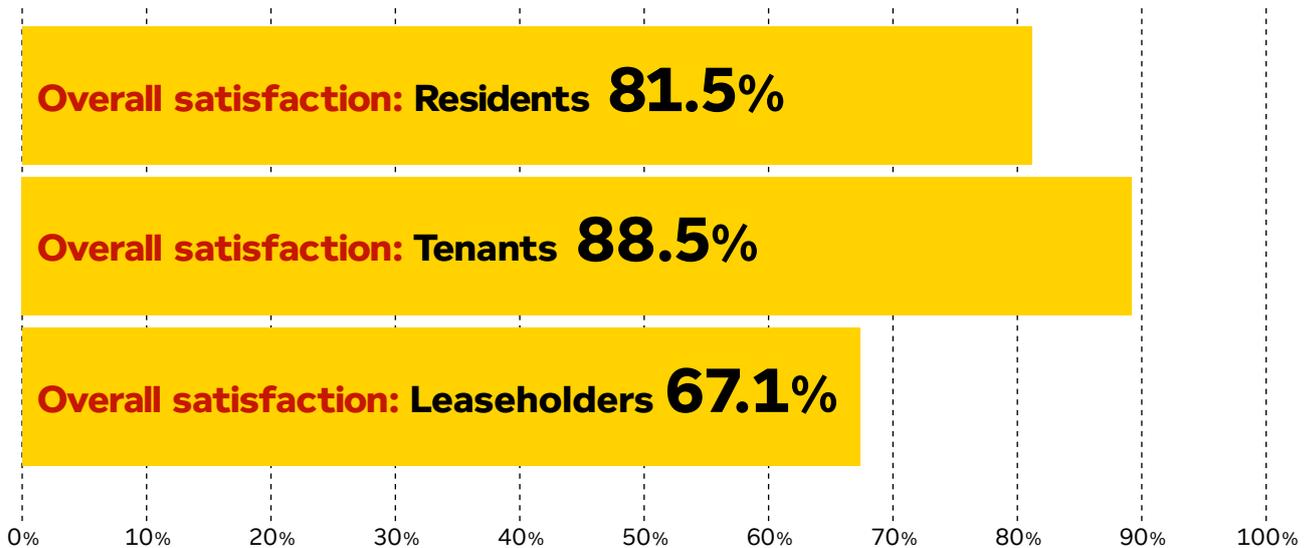
1 True; 2 True; 3 False



Solutions

- 8 Sleep; 10 Sure
- 5 Napoleon;
- 2 Kite; 3 Dress;
- 1 Uncommon;
- Down:
- 12 Note; 13 Pigeon
- 9 Mail; 11 Excuse;
- 7 Soap; 8 SOS;
- 4 Run; 6 Cattle;
- Across: 1 Unkind;

How we're doing



Christmas opening arrangements

Over the Christmas and New Year break our Watney Market office will be closed and our Rushmead housing office will be open as shown on the right. Our phone lines will be closed from 5.30pm on Friday 23 December until 8.30am on Tuesday 3 January 2017.

If you have an emergency repair during this period, please call our repairs helpline: 020 7364 5015 or 0800 376 1637. For all other enquiries, please contact us when we re-open on Tuesday 3 January.

Friday	23 December	9am – 4.30pm
Saturday	24 December	closed
Sunday	25 December	closed
Monday	26 December	closed
Tuesday	27 December	closed
Wednesday	28 December	9am – 4.30pm
Thursday	29 December	9am – 4.30pm
Friday	30 December	9am – 4.30pm
Saturday	31 December	closed
Sunday	1 January	closed
Monday	2 January	closed
Tuesday	3 January	9am – 4.30pm

Remember to pay your rent

We know that Christmas is an expensive time of year, but please don't miss your rent payment. You can pay your rent by calling our automated payment line on 020 7364 3800.



Randall House is part of the Poplar Baths development with 60 new homes.

Working with our partners we're providing 5,500 new affordable homes for borough residents between 2014-18.

