

## THCH – SERVICE STANDARDS

**In August 2000 THCH published the first “Service Guarantee”. This reflected the importance we put on making sure that we provided the best possible housing management service as we started to plan the improvements to your homes.**

**This is the third revision of those standards, the last two reviews being in 2006 and 2009, however this last revision was undertaken following detailed consultation with all residents in 2010.**

**Our Service Guarantee covers a wide range of services including general standards on how we aim to provide the service overall including how we plan to offer you value for money. More specifically there are standards covering how you can be involved with THCH, how we maintain your home, how we manage your tenancy and how we will work with other agencies to improve your neighbourhood and tackle anti-social behaviour.**

**You will also find at the end of this booklet a short explanation on what we do to ensure that we do what we say we will do in our Service Standards. We measure our performance regularly reporting the results to our local Area Resident Boards as well as to our Joint Area Resident Board. This ensures that our residents can actively assess how well we are performing and comment directly to senior managers at THCH as well as to our governing body, the THCH Board. We also have monthly management meetings which review performance, the results of which are reported to our Service Delivery Committee and our Board which ensures that our governing body is aware of how well we are doing and the areas where we need to improve.**

**These standards were agreed by our Board in March 2011 following contributions from residents directly as well as from our Joint Area Resident Board. The THCH Service Delivery Committee and Joint Area Resident Board will review these standards again next year to ensure they are the right ones and then we will review them again every three years.**

**I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who contributed to drafting these standards.**

**David Eatwell; Director of Housing, March 2011**

## The THCH Service Guarantee

**Our service guarantee starts with our mission – this is our starting point as a housing provider, a charity and a business. The THCH mission is set out in our Corporate Plan. We include our mission in the service standards because it represents what we are aiming to achieve overall.**

### Our Mission

Our main goal is “to continue to be an excellent community based Housing Association working with stakeholders to provide safe, high quality affordable homes and value for money services, contributing to the social and economic regeneration of the local community”.

### Our Service Standards

Our service standards cover the following areas;

<b>General</b>	<b>Tenant Involvement and Empowerment</b>	<b>Home</b>	<b>Tenancy</b>	<b>Neighbourhood and Community</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer Service</li> <li>• Leasehold Management</li> <li>• Value for Money</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resident Involvement Statement</li> <li>• Working in the Community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repairs</li> <li>• Cyclical Maintenance</li> <li>• Quality of your home</li> <li>• Improving Your Home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letting Empty Homes</li> <li>• Wanting to Move</li> <li>• Collecting Your Rent</li> <li>• Tenancy Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anti-Social Behaviour</li> <li>• Estate Services</li> </ul>

**Our service.**

- THCH provides safe, high quality, affordable homes and an excellent service. We demonstrate our commitment to the best possible customer service by
  - Providing an accessible service
  - Treating all people in a fair and friendly way
  - Dealing with your enquiry promptly
  - Treating your enquiry seriously

**When you contact THCH.**

**Our people:**

- Are polite, courteous and clear about what can and cannot be done.
- Give their name and always have an identity card.
- Deal with your enquiry sensitively and effectively, using agreed policies and procedures and in an easy to understand way.
- Keep appointments

**Our telephone service**

- We answer telephones between 9am and 5pm.
- 90% of our calls are answered within 10 seconds.
- The person who answers the telephone tells you their name.
- We always ring you back by the next working day:
  - if you ask us to
  - If the query cannot be dealt with immediately
  - If you leave a message on an answer-phone when the office is shut
- We provide an out of hours contact number in the event of an emergency.
- We provide a 24 hour anti-social behaviour hotline.

**Our offices**

- Are staffed from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays.
- Open at the following times

	Bethnal Green	Shadwell & Wapping	Spitalfields	HQ
Monday	10am to 1pm 2pm to 4pm	10am to 1pm 2pm to 4pm	10am to 1pm	9am to 5pm
Tuesday	10am to 1pm 2pm to 4pm	10am to 1pm 2pm to 4pm	10am to 1pm	9am to 5pm
Wednesday	10am to 1pm closed pm	10am to 1pm closed pm	10am to 1pm	9am to 5pm
Thursday	10am to 1pm 2pm to 4pm	10am to 1pm 2pm to 4pm	10am to 1pm	9am to 5pm
Friday	10am to 1pm 2pm to 4pm	10am to 1pm 2pm to 4pm	10am to 1pm	9am to 5pm

**Helping you with your enquiry**

- We aim to see you within 5 minutes of your arrival and deal with your enquiry there and then.
- If you need someone else to help you, an interview will be arranged with an appropriate officer within 3 working days.
- If you need an office appointment when the office is closed (but after 8am and before 6pm on weekdays only) an interview will be arranged with an appropriate officer within 5 working days.
- If a home visit is required that will take place within 10 working days.
- If you need a signer, interpreter or translator, we will try to arrange this if you let us know in advance.
- Our reception areas are kept clean, tidy and welcoming.

### **Correspondence**

- We reply to all letters and emails requiring a response within 10 working days. If this is not possible we will tell you so within 5 days.
- Letters, emails and newsletters are written clearly in plain English, avoiding jargon
- We include a guide to housing terms on our website.

### **Access to information**

- We ensure that leaflets and notices in our reception areas are clear, up to date and in plain English.
- We offer translations on request for leaflets and notices.
- We provide access to information and to services through our website at **[www.thch.org.uk](http://www.thch.org.uk)**.
- We publish Update, our residents' newsletter, every month, except December.
- We publish our annual accounts, our annual report, our policies, as well as agendas and minutes of our Resident Board meetings on our website

### **Our Website**

- Our website is as accessible as reasonably possible
- We include the minutes and agendas of residents meetings, key policies and a wide range of useful information
- We make online payments available
- We ensure you can report repairs, comments or complaints online
- We provide advice on housing options, welfare benefits and links to useful agencies
- We provide information on our development programme online
- We provide information about our community facilities and community activities online
- We provide relevant news items online

**Putting things right**

If we have made a mistake we:

- Put it right as quickly as we can and say we are sorry.
- Provide compensation for broken repair appointments.
- Have a clear formal complaints procedure – details available at our offices.
- Analyse complaints made and make appropriate changes to the service.
- Provide residents with regular feedback on our performance and acknowledge what we are doing wrong as well as areas where we are performing well.

**Leasehold management**

- We provide you with a leaseholders handbook which explains your rights and obligations as a leaseholder.
- We provide an estimated service charge in April of each year.
- We provide an actual service charge account in October of each year showing a balance on the account.
- We offer special arrangements to pay major works bills.
- We expect you to pay your service charges and take action when you do not.
- We offer a range of opportunities to pay your charges
- We encourage service charges to be paid by direct debit as this is the most cost-effective method of collection.
- We are firm but fair when seeking to recover debts and agree reasonable and affordable repayment terms.
- We take legal action against those who wilfully do not pay.
- We seek to recover our costs for any legal action we have to take for non-payment.
- We provide an account balance over the telephone with written confirmation in 5 working days.
- We provide a maintenance plan following major works.
- We provide an insurance certificate annually.
- We provide an annual breakdown of communal repairs costs.
- We provide an itemised bill based on the costs for each block.
- In addition, we:
  - hold events specially for leaseholders
  - publish features for leaseholders in "Update"
  - allow leaseholders to inspect the documentation for major works within 1 month of the request
  - consider buying back leaseholders in certain circumstances
  - offer a pre Right to Buy interview before purchase is completed.

**Value for Money**

- We review our business plan annually to ensure service improvements and agreed projects are resourced
- We include efficiency targets when we review our budgets every year
- We use new technology to improve how we work
- We regularly review how we manage ourselves to make sure we are an efficient business focussing on our customers
- We regularly test and review our key services
- We manage our tax affairs efficiently
- We ensure all our staff understand that residents demand value for money and that our managers deliver services in this way
- We maintain our properties in good condition and conduct annual option appraisals for each major asset.
- We make sure staff are fit for work by promoting good health and wellbeing
- We compare our costs with other organisations

## Resident Involvement Statement

- Eight of our board positions are for residents, six selected from tenants and two from leaseholders.
- Area Resident Boards are open to all residents and provide an opportunity for residents to scrutinise the work of THCH, comment on policy and service improvements and engage directly with senior THCH officers in a formal structure. Leaseholder Steering Group provides a similar function for leaseholders.
- The Joint Area Resident Board consists entirely of delegates selected by the ARBs and provides a link to the THCH Board and Service Committees.
- These bodies are designed to get your views and gather information on the services that are important to you. We recognise however different people will want to get involved at different levels and that not everyone can take part in formal meetings that usually take place in the evening so we have also designed other ways for you to become involved.
- These include
  - Focus groups;
  - Local Forum meetings
  - Surveys
  - Events
  - Residents Associations
  - Service Review Steering Groups
  - Estate inspections
  - Mystery Shopping
  - Consumer Panel
  - Board Membership
  - Service Committees
- We also offer support and training for residents based on how you want to be involved.
- We review how effective we are regularly so that we can continue to help you stay involved with our work.

Repairs.

- We provide an emergency repair service 365 days a year, 24-hours a day.
- We offer an appointment for inspection requests for repairs within 15 days.
- We offer an appointment for carrying out your repair which will depend on the job priority and when it is convenient for you.
- You can report a repair by telephone, letter, email, through our website at [www.thch.org.uk](http://www.thch.org.uk) or in person at your Community Housing Office.
- We confirm the order has been raised by agreeing an appointment or sending a receipt.
- Repairs are carried out to a high standard.
- We charge you for the cost of the repair if you cause damage to your home and we carry out the repair.
- We inspect at least 10% of all completed repairs.
- If we are carrying out major repairs to your homes we ensure there is a resident liaison officer to work with you and we consult with you on the nature of the work and how it is to be carried out.
- We publicise how to complain about repairs in Update and in our Housing Offices.

Cyclical Maintenance

- We decorate the common parts of our buildings at least every seven years
- We service tenants heating and hot water boilers annually
- We carry out annual gas safety checks for tenants
- We carry out regular fire safety assessments of common parts of blocks of flats

Quality of your homes

- We provide tenants with safe and healthy living conditions.
- We keep tenants' homes in a reasonable state of repair.
- We ensure tenants' homes have reasonably modern facilities and services.
- We ensure tenants homes have efficient heating and effective insulation.
- If you have to move out to allow major works to be carried out we will compensate you in accordance with our compensation policy, this includes reasonable costs of removals, disconnection and reconnection, redirection of mail and some disturbance costs.
- If we are carrying out security improvements we will consult with the Police's Secured by Design Officers.
- We will consult with you if we are carrying improvements to your home.
- We will send a short questionnaire for you to tell us what you thought of any major repairs to your home.
- We will ensure our contractors comply with the Considerate Constructors Scheme when works are underway.
- If you want to carry out home improvements yourself we will not unreasonably refuse our consent to those improvements.

Letting empty homes

- We let all available empty homes within 3 weeks on average.
- Your new home has a new lock on the front door; the gas and electricity services are checked; and doors and windows serviced.
- Your new home is clean and clear of rubbish.
- Your new home is decorated to a reasonable standard or an allowance is offered.
- Your Community Housing Officer visits you within six weeks of moving into your new home.

### Wanting a Move

- Advice is available on options for you if you want to move home.
- We explain clearly about your realistic chances of getting a move.
- Where we may be able to help with a move we complete your transfer form within 10 days of you contacting us.
- We visit before an offer is made to make sure you have kept your home in good repair.
- Details of mutual exchange schemes are available from our local offices.

### Collecting your rent

- You can pay your rent at Post Offices using your 'rent swipe card', online, by telephone, by direct debit or standing order
- We provide a rent statement every 3 months and upon request.
- We contact you about any money you owe as early as possible by letter, telephone or personal visit.
- We offer advice on benefits or direct you to someone who can offer such advice.
- We are firm but fair when seeking to recover debts and agree reasonable and affordable repayment terms.
- We take legal action against those tenants who wilfully do not pay their rent.
- We seek to recover our costs for any legal action we have to take against tenants for non-payment of rent.

### Tenancy Management

- We provide you with a Tenants Handbook which explains your rights and obligations as a tenant.
- We provide advice and assistance about mutual exchanges or transferring your tenancy to another person.
- We provide advice and assistance when you are moving home and on how you must end your tenancy legally.
- We offer tenants the opportunity to view THCH service charge accounts annually.
- We expect all residents to respect their homes and take appropriate action against those who breach their tenancy conditions.
- Letters or notices that ask residents to comply with reasonable conditions will be polite and helpful.

**Antisocial behaviour**

- We take all reports seriously
- We investigate reports of racial or sexual harassment, or domestic violence within 24 hours if it is on our property.
- We investigate all other reports of anti-social behaviour within 5 working days.
- We review anti-social behaviour cases monthly
- We provide feedback to all residents reporting anti-social behaviour explaining what will be done and by when.
- We do not disclose information to any other party without your permission or without following agreed protocols.
- We do not get involved in minor neighbour disputes or where other remedies are available to the individuals.
- We work in partnership with other agencies to either try to mediate or take other action where appropriate.

**Estate services.**

- We aim to keep our estates clean and free from litter and refuse and we check this daily.
- Offensive graffiti is removed within 24 hours. Where practical other graffiti is cleaned off within 5 working days.
- We inspect lifts and door entry security systems daily and order any necessary repairs within one working day.
- We carry out full inspections of estates every month and residents are encouraged to attend.
- We provide controlled parking measures on all our estates.
- We carry out planned cyclical maintenance on all trees on THCH communal lands.
- We keep all our grounds and gardens tidy and well maintained.
- We agree reasonable local cleaning standards with residents.

**Working in the Community**

- We have a policy for decorating one or more rooms every five years for elderly and disabled residents.
- We build new homes to mobility standards.
- If you need a signer, interpreter or translator, we try to arrange this if you let us know in advance.
- We offer translations on request for leaflets and notices.
- We monitor the use of our services by different groups in the community to ensure that our service reflects the needs of the community.
- We operate in a manner sensitive to the religious and cultural environment of Tower Hamlets.

## Monitoring the Standards

**It is important to make sure that we are measuring our performance against these standards to ensure that we are keeping to our promises and delivering the service in the way we aim to.**

**We measure our performance in a number of ways:**

- **we have set a number of performance targets**
- **we compare our performance with that of other housing providers, large and small, national and local**
- **we have planned internal and external audits**

### Measuring performance

**Every month all THCH managers meet to receive performance reports on key areas of the service. These reports include measurement of our performance against annual targets and allow us to keep track of our performance over time and discuss areas where we need to improve.**

**Some examples of targets we review every month include:**

**How quickly telephone calls are answered – because we have promised to answer calls in 10 seconds**

**How quickly letters, emails, complaints and member enquiries are answered – because we have promised to answer them in 10 days**

**What people are complaining about – so that we can identify where we need to improve**

**Whether repairs appointments are being kept – so we can reduce inconvenience to tenants**

**How much rent or service charge arrears are owed – so we can keep track of our income**

**How clean our estates are – because our residents deserve to live in a clean environment**

**How often staff are absent sick – to improve our efficiency and test whether our staffing policies are working**

**Every month we review about 30 reports measuring over 100 targets. This performance is then summarised and reported to our Area Resident Boards, to our Joint Area Resident Board, to our Service Delivery Committee and to our Board.**