

My Corner goes live

Our new self-service website for residents opened for business on 28 November – offering you access to our services 24 hours a day.

Easy access

Instead of phoning us or calling in at the office, you can now sign in to the website to:

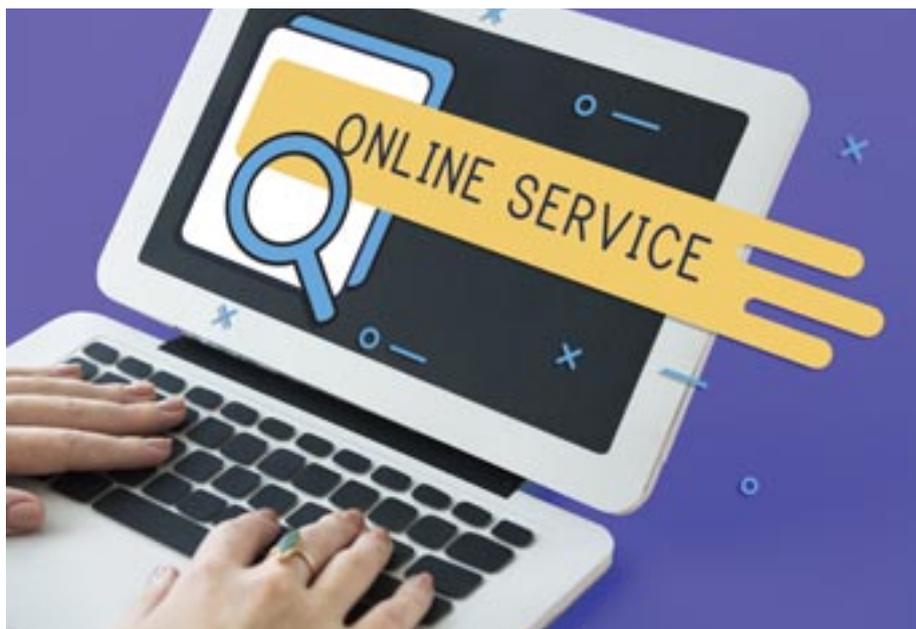
- report a repair online
- view your repair history
- check your rent account
- pay your rent online
- print out a rent statement
- update your contact details, phone numbers and email address, or
- leave feedback or a complaint.

You can access the website on your phone, tablet or computer.

Get signed up

To get started, you will first need to register with us formally. Go to the website at www.thch.org.uk and click on the *My Corner* icon.

You will be asked for:



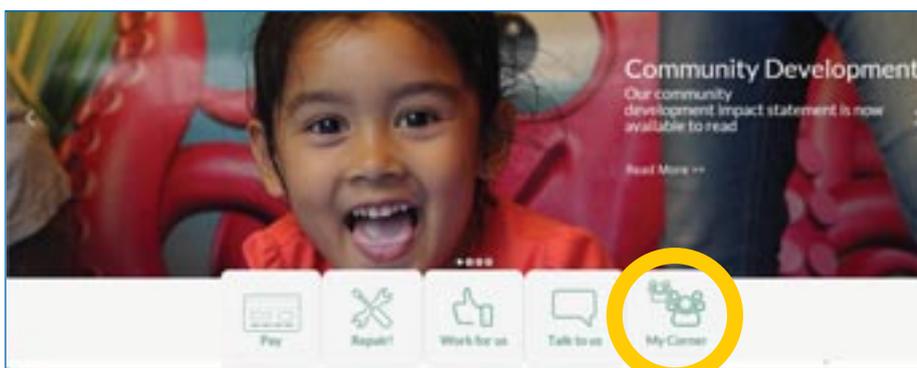
- your name, and
- your tenancy or leasehold number – this is the five-digit number shown on your rent/service charge statement or rent card.

The Customer Service Team will check the details you send and send you a verification code so that you can log in. Or they may have to phone you if your details aren't clear.

We would like to thank all the residents who helped us to test the site, before we went live.

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Winter Update from Pam Bhamra, Director of Operations

Welcome to our winter Update – the first edition to be online only.

In this issue, we highlight the launch of our new web-based services, which give you easy access to check your rent account, order repairs and more – 24 hours a day, seven days a week. (See the front page for sign-up details.)

Alongside this change, from January, we will be changing our office opening hours to focus on the times when most people want to contact us (see p3).

We are also taking on board many

of the recommendations made by the Resident Scrutiny Panel, following their review of the work of the Customer Service Team earlier in the year (see p3).

All of these changes are designed to improve the core customer services we provide.

Now that our new mobile estate cleaning teams are out and about. We're also seeing improvements at your estates (see pp6-7). The new arrangement is also making better use of staff.

As you will see in this issue, we are

continuing to support your communities with new activities. If you have plans for a project of your own, why not apply for a small grant from us? (We explain more on p12.)

Finally, we wish you and your families a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year – however you celebrate the winter break.

But please don't forget to pay your rent. Start the New Year in credit and protect your home in 2019.



Seasons greetings

We would like to wish our residents all the very best for Christmas and the New Year.

Christmas holiday office opening hours

We will close at 4pm on Monday 24 December 2018 and re-open at 9am on Wednesday 2 January 2019.

If you have a genuine repairs emergency during this time, call our normal out-of-hours service on 020 7780 3070.

Put paying your rent first this Christmas

- You can pay from your iPhone or Android smart phone, by using the allpay app. Download the app from our website.
- Or you can pay online from our website at www.thch.org.uk, and from your My Corner account.



Opening hours change in January

We're changing our office opening hours from Monday 14 January 2019 – to prioritise the times when most residents make contact with us.

For the past two years, we've been trying out extended office opening hours – from 8am to 6pm on weekdays.

But when we carried out an in-depth review from November 2017 to April 2018, we found the extra hours were not being well used.

Our review included surveying residents, analysing call volumes, counting the number of people calling in at reception and recording the reasons why residents were contacting us. It showed that:

- we get very little contact from residents during the first and last 45 minutes of our office hours
- our peak time for phone calls is between 8.45am and 5pm
- calls drop off by two-thirds after 5pm, and
- calls are three times higher from 9-10am than from 8-9am.

Given that we are also launching our My Corner online service (see the front page), we think the extended



On weekdays, you will be able to:

- phone us between 8.30am and 5pm
- call in at reception from 9am to 5pm, or
- use our 24-hour online service.

hours are no longer the best use of our resources. Instead, we will focus on providing the best service possible during our new core hours.

Resident Scrutiny Panel reports back on the Customer Service Team



More training and better use of in-house IT – these are the main recommendations made by the Resident Scrutiny Panel, following their review of the Customer Service Team.

Our Panel, made up of four residents with support from an independent mentor, carried out a review of customer contact during the spring and summer. They presented their final report on 15 November to an Operations Committee meeting.

We invite the Panel to carry out reviews, so they can:

- help us develop services and give value for money
- suggest ways to improve things for residents
- check and challenge our performance, and
- tell us when we are getting things right.

In this case, the Panel found that we weren't always making the best use of our housing software. They recommended making some changes to codes, bringing in more staff

training and providing better information to new staff.

They want us to keep talking to contractors, to pass on all relevant information about repairs and to minimise sub-contracting when we next make new contracts.

We welcome new residents joining the Scrutiny Panel. To find out more, email our Resident Engagement Officer at Halima.islam@thch.org.uk, or phone her on 020 7780 3070, or send a message through your My Corner account.



More action on sub-letting

We're continuing our drive to stamp out illegal sub-letting – with two recent successes.

In one case, the original tenant of a one bedroom flat had been living abroad for the past two years. Her son was letting out the flat at a private rent.

The family were still claiming Housing Benefit in the name of the original tenant – which is benefit fraud. The Council is now taking action to recover this money.

In another case, a former resident had been letting out a three bedroom maisonette, while living somewhere else in Essex.

We have now let these properties to households on the common housing register.

Remember: if you let your rented THCH home to someone else – or hand it over for 'key money' – you're committing social housing fraud. This is now a criminal offence. We will always investigate and take action.

Tell us what you know

If you think a property is occupied by the wrong people, or is being used as an AirBnB or other holiday let, please call us on 020 7780 3070. You don't need to leave your name. You will be helping us to take back a property for local people in housing need.

Keeping our water systems safe

Envirocure have been carrying out water testing at our estates – to make sure there's no risk of Legionnaire's Disease.

Legionella bacteria are common in natural water sources like rivers, but they can also grow in water tanks and other water systems in buildings. Left untreated, these bacteria can cause serious illnesses that are particularly dangerous for older people and others with health problems.

Envirocure have been working around our estates to inspect communal water tanks. They also check a random sample of one in 10 flats, while they are at each estate.

The company has a branded van and their employees wear a uniform. But you should always ask for ID. If you are worried, you can call us to check on any contractor. You should never let anyone into your home if you are unsure.

Pictured right is Envirocure's operative, Richard, who has been working at a lot of our properties.



Young @ Heart

Bethnal Green based Over 60s Club



Tuesday's & Friday's
9:00am - 3:00pm
Zander Court Club Room
50 Zander Court
Bethnal Green
London
E2 7AY

For more information, please contact THCH's Community Development Team on 020 7780 3070



Community group raises over £500

The Mohila Ongon Women's Association raised an impressive £500 for MacMillan Cancer Support in September.

We were pleased to help the organisers to hold a fun day, bazaar and fundraiser.

We would like to send a huge well done to Ferdous, who leads the group, as well as the other group members involved in hosting the event.

This was a great sum to raise for a very worthy cause.

New sewing club launches in Shadwell

In early November, we were delighted to support the third sewing project based at one of our community centres – with the launch of the Mum's Sewing Café Club.



Our Community Development Team worked with group members throughout the autumn and arranged for five sewing machines to be donated to help kick-start the project.

The Shadwell-based group are local mums who meet every Monday at the Tarling East Community Centre, after dropping their children off at nearby schools.

They would welcome new members and are keen to hear from local residents who have a passion for sewing, hobby-craft and making their own clothes.

For more information, email ola5sulaiman@gmail.com

Better estate services with the Environmental Services Teams

Our new-look cleaning teams got down to work on 3 October 2018 – and they are already making a difference.

Community teams

We now have three community cleaning teams covering:

- the Bethnal Green area (north)
- from Luke House up to Spitalfields (central), and
- homes near to the A13 (south).

Working in teams is already giving us continuity of cover and means we don't have to pay extra for temporary staff.

Our aim is to provide a more flexible service, to a higher standard than before.

Power Clean Team

We also have a new Power Clean Team, carrying out deep cleaning to communal areas in blocks around the borough. In their first month, they focused on cleaning bin rooms at several of our estates.

All our teams travel in vans stocked with the equipment they need. We are also investing in new cleaning machines to boost the standard and increase efficiency.

How you can help

Our teams work to new standards, backed by a photobook of examples. You can check this by going online to www.thch.org.uk/your-home/estate-services/

We are aiming to clean to level A and for areas to remain at a level B between visits. But if we drop to levels C or D, we're asking you to send us pictures via our website. Your feedback will make a direct difference to your estate.

Our four standard levels

Level A: Excellent – has just been completely cleaned. Your communal area is clean – even if the décor has signs of wear and tear.

Level B: Good – area is clean and tidy. There may be a little litter or signs of foot traffic.

Level C: Poor – needs attention.

Level D: Unacceptable – needs immediate attention.

The North Team



The Central Team



The South Team



The Power Clean Team



Before and after

A bin area is transformed, following a targeted visit by the Power Clean Team.

Before



After



Before and after

An estate courtyard moves from an unsightly mess to a clean and tidy area.



Before



After



LEAP - The Energy and Money Saving Service

FREE
FOR LOCAL
RESIDENTS

We are offering local residents a completely **FREE OF CHARGE** service called **LEAP** (Local Energy Advice Partnership). **LEAP** can help you to save money and keep your home warm and cosy.

ARE YOU ELIGIBLE?

You may be eligible for the LEAP service if one of the following apply to you:

- You have a low income
- You receive tax credits
- You receive Housing Benefit
- You receive an income or disability related benefit
- You have a long term illness or disability.

Call us now on **0800 988 2881**

(Freephone) to book your free home visit, or email:

advice@actonenergy.org.uk

@LeapService



How LEAP works

If you're eligible, you will get a **FREE** home visit from a friendly, qualified Home Energy Advisor

LEAP can:

- Help you check you're on the **cheapest energy tariffs** – for savings over £280 a year
- Install **FREE, simple energy-saving items** – saving £30 a year on the average bill
- Give you **day-to-day energy efficiency hints and tips** and ensure your heating system is set up to keep you warm and save money
- Arrange a **FREE phone advice service** to help with benefits, debt and money problems
- Refer you for **further energy efficiency improvements**, such as loft insulation or a new boiler

£140 Warm Home Discount – Act now!

If you're facing fuel poverty – and your energy supplier belongs to the scheme – you could get £140 paid towards your energy bills.

The Warm Home Discount is a government project aimed at tackling fuel poverty.

Who benefits: pensioners

All the big energy suppliers – those with more than 250,000 customers – have to offer rebates of £140 to less-well-off pensioners. You qualify for this if you get a Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit).

The Department of Work and Pensions helps suppliers to work out which of their customers should get the rebate. So, you should get this automatically.

Who benefits: other fuel-poor customers

Energy suppliers have to offer rebates of £140 to other customers at risk of fuel poverty. But they have their own rules for who qualifies.

To get money paid towards your energy bills, you have to contact your supplier to ask for it. They set only a limited amount of money aside each year, so you should contact them straight away, so that you don't miss out this winter.

There is more information about the Warm Home Discount scheme at:



www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme, or contact your energy supplier.



How to avoid condensation

When condensation causes black mould, it can be a health hazard. But there are ways to stop this happening.

Condensation is moisture held in the air. It becomes a problem when you produce so much moisture that when the air settles on cold surfaces it leaves them dripping wet. Wet surfaces can develop mould.

Take the following three steps to reduce your condensation problem.

Reduce moisture

- Keep saucepan lids on when cooking and use your cooker hood.
- Vent tumble driers to the outside.
- Avoid drying clothes indoors. Use a room with ventilation if you must.
- Shut the bathroom door when bathing or showering.
- Shut the kitchen door when cooking.

Raise the temperature

Condensation is most common in houses that are difficult to keep warm. Improving your heating and insulation are the best way to raise the temperature.

Increase ventilation

Provide ventilation without too much cold air, which will lower the room temperature.

- Introduce extractor fans in areas where you produce a lot of moisture.
- Don't draughtproof kitchen and bathroom windows – to allow some natural ventilation.
- Move items of furniture slightly away from outside walls to allow air to circulate.

Remove mould

Treat any mould by washing walls and window frames with a fungicidal wash with a Health & Safety Executive approval number. Follow manufacturers' guidelines.

Note: Dehumidifiers are expensive to run and don't really solve the problem. It is better to take steps to balance the level of moisture, heat and ventilation in your home.

Fire safety first: update and reminders

We are currently investing in our blocks to improve fire safety – because your health and safety are our top priority.



Fire door programme

We recently completed work at Charles Dickens House, where we replaced the front doors to individual flats and upgraded the communal doors. We are now on site at Luke House doing the same. The new doors meet the latest fire safety standards and have strong security features.

Residents at Charles Dickens House gave us positive feedback, with **96%** saying they were satisfied with the improvements to their home and the quality of work.

One reported back: "Workers worked very hard – work done in one day. Communication and programme all done well. Very satisfied."

Another said: "The work was done really well and the workers were professional in their approach."

Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs)

We also have up-to-date fire risk assessments on all the blocks that need one. We have completed, or are working on, all the high-priority recommendations that came up during the assessments.

Tenant fire risk responsibilities

Smoking comes top of the fire risk list, as the cause of more than one in four fire deaths.

Recently, a THCH resident fell asleep with a cigarette, causing the belongings in their flat and on their balcony to catch fire.

So, please, if you can't stop smoking – take extra care not to cause a fire. See the Fire Brigade tips opposite.

Other fire risk tips – especially over Christmas

- Don't walk away from lit candles.
- Check your Christmas tree lights for electrical faults.
- Check your smoke alarms at least once a month.
- Don't overload electrical sockets.
- Don't cook when over-tired or if you have been drinking alcohol.

- Never leave pans unwatched.
- If a pan catches fire, turn off the heat if you can. Don't throw water onto it.
- Check everything is safe before you go to bed. Close doors, switch off electrical items and avoid charging phones overnight.

Communal areas and balconies

We have strict rules on whether you can keep doormats and other items in communal areas, depending on the type of building you live in. If you aren't sure, check our website.

We have rules for balconies too.

- Don't use your balcony as storage space.
- Don't leave a lot of items there, including bicycles.
- Don't leave items on balconies that could catch fire – including reed fencing.

Smoking – lower the risk

Some tips from the Fire Brigade.

- It's safer to smoke outside – but clear up carefully.
- Don't smoke in bed – or on the sofa, if you might fall asleep.
- Take extra care when you're tired, or if you've had alcohol.
- Use proper ashtrays and don't balance cigarettes on the edge. Empty the contents, preferably wet, into a bin not a wastepaper basket.
- Don't leave lit pipes or cigarettes unattended.
- Keep matches and lighters out of children's reach.
- Never smoke if you use healthcare equipment like medical oxygen or an air flow pressure relief mattress.

- Remember that we don't allow you to throw cigarette butts from your balcony.

Summer Word Search Winner

Congratulations to Ms Villalobos from Shadwell who was drawn as the winner of our Word Search in the last issue of *Update*. She wins a £25 shopping voucher.

Competition: How well do you know our estates?

Tick the correct name for each of the six properties shown below and you could win £25.



- Fuchsia Court
- John Scurr House
- Winterton House



- Leopold Building
- Charles Dickens House
- Brady Street



- Norton House
- Cable Street
- Peter House



- Apollo House
- Lysander House
- Zander Court



- Barnardo Gardens
- Luke House
- Trahorn Close



- Stuttle House
- Robert Sutton House
- Bigland Street

How to enter

Send this page, with your name and address, to 285 Commercial Road, London, E1 2PS. Or email a copy to customerservices@thch.org.uk
Closing date 9 January 2019.

One entry per household and the winner will be randomly drawn from all correct entries.

Name

Address

Postcode

Phone number



Our performance to 30 September 2018



Rent arrears
4.2%
 (target 3.4%)



Rent collection
96.7%
 (target 101.4%)

Empty homes
 Average time to let (days)
23
 (target 25)



Emergency repairs completed on time
92%
 (target 97%)



Non-emergency repairs
 Average time to complete (days)
8
 (target 9)



Calls answered within 30 seconds
94%
 (target 94%)




Repairs completed at first visit
87%
 (target 93%)



Complaints responded to on target
93%
 (target 88%)

Valid gas safety certificate
 % of homes
100%
 (target 100%)



These Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) measure important areas of our service. We report the results to the Board and make them available to the resident forums. We are also members of HouseMark, which tracks and compares our performance with other housing providers.

Supporting the community

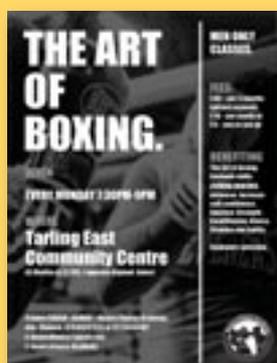
Our small grants scheme offers support to residents and groups running community projects that match the four themes of our Community Development Strategy.

These are:

- To improve the financial inclusion and employability of residents.
- To improve the health and wellbeing of residents.
- To work with young people to help them be successful in later life.
- To empower communities to become active residents.

We recently approved two awards: one went to the Boxers Fitness Academy to purchase much-needed new sporting equipment and the other to St Hilda's/LinkAge Plus to support an Over-50s New Year's Party.

For more information, please call our Community Development Team on 020 7780 3070 or email customerservices@thch.org.uk



Ways to contact us

My Corner: report a repair or send a message through your account

Web: www.thch.org.uk

Email: customerservices@thch.org.uk (for general enquiries)

Phone: 020 7780 3070

- from 8am to 6pm (for all enquiries, or to report a repair)
- from 6pm to 8am (out-of-hours emergencies only)

 Facebook: TowerHamlets Community Housing

 Twitter: @THCH_LTD

 Instagram: @THCH_LTD

For training and monitoring purposes, to improve service quality, we record calls to the Customer Service Team.