

Scrutiny Panel Report on THCH Out-of-Hours Repairs Service

Scrutiny conducted July-December 2017

This report produced 24 January 2018

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INTRODUCTION

Scrutiny panels conduct reviews of areas of Housing Association (HA) operation and provide assessments of performance and value for money, independently of HA staff. They report to the Board.

Scrutiny panels have become a common and important element of HA oversight. They usually consist of resident volunteers, and contribute to satisfying government requirements on tenant and resident involvement and empowerment. See Appendix 12 Housing and Communities Agency - Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard.

About the THCH Scrutiny Panel

We are 5 unpaid residents who responded to a request from THCH for volunteers to participate. We are a diverse group, including residents from different areas geographically, male and female, and different ethnic backgrounds. Four of us are tenants, and one of us is a leaseholder. We are particularly interested in the resident experience of the service, but also interested in the value for money aspect and any opportunities there might be for THCH to reduce costs while maintaining or improving the service.

As this scrutiny panel is a new experience for residents and THCH, THCH paid for 2 training sessions with a mentor from HQN, and he assisted throughout this first scrutiny. This was extremely helpful and has resulted in a thorough approach to gathering and documenting various items of information and evidence supporting the scrutiny.

How the area for this scrutiny was chosen

Normally, scrutiny panels should choose the area to review for each scrutiny by negotiation with the HA, but as this scrutiny panel is a new experience for residents and THCH alike, THCH specified, and we accepted, to review the Out-of-Hours repairs service.

SCOPE OF THE SCRUTINY

The focus was the current experience of residents and possible improvements both in the OOH service and value for money. The scrutiny additionally touched on the contractual arrangements, the repairs service overall, the use of IT in relation to repairs, and customer service follow-up, but these were not scrutinised in depth. See Appendix 11 Scoping document

READERS OF THIS REPORT

This report is designed to be read by residents, staff, board members and anyone who is interested in THCH.

OVERVIEW OF OUR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key findings

First, a positive finding. The existence of a “Rapid Response” cleaning team rota and the arrangements for senior staff to be on call for major incidents were welcomed by the scrutiny panel as examples of good practice.

One of the most common complaints from residents is that they were not informed about what is happening after they made their OOH call. Other complaints are about slow response times.

Many complaints from residents are about the quality of actions taken by the OOH contractors and their follow - up visits. Some residents seem to be not clear about what constitutes a valid reason for an OOH callout.

The repairs contractors are paid the same fee whether the OOH visit performs a repair or not. If they do not perform the repair on the OOH visit, they are paid again for a working-day visit. In other words there is no incentive to repair on the spot.

We observed that repair performance statistics are produced by the contractor, not by THCH.

THCH receive a log of all OOH calls from the call centre **via London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH)** instead of direct which regularly creates delays. LBTH manually **retype** the data which the scrutiny panel finds astonishing.

General Dynamics Information Technology (GDIT) provides the call centre service. They charge £1.20 per minute to call the repairs contractor for an OOH incident. GDIT are perfectly happy to use email (free) instead, provided the contractor accepts this, for a small setup fee. General Dynamics charge about £2.50 per call to them from residents, and the **average** number of calls to them per incident is four. The new contract planned by the Ealing consortium will charge £6 per call.

In one OOH case, the log reports that K&T (heating contractor) attended but took no action because the problem was in adjacent plumbing rather than the boiler itself. In this example a further visit was made which added to the cost.

The THCH telephone system at present cannot automatically switch callers to the OOH service outside office hours. Instead a recorded message tells callers to ring the LBTH number which is extra time and cost for residents, many of whom are on low incomes.

Key Recommendations (also see the recommendations table on page 10)

THCH should require the repairs contractor to contact the resident as soon as they have been allocated the job, to inform them of estimated time of arrival.

THCH should require the repairs contractors to give residents updates if the response is delayed.

THCH should explain to all residents what justifies an OOH callout. THCH should explain to all residents that the call centre cannot do more than make a request to a repair contractor. The call centre cannot report on progress – only the contractor can do that. Also that the contractor is required to make safe which may mean water or electricity is cut off until the next working day. *The THCH website should contain all this information.*

We are aware that the GDIT contract will end in September 2018. THCH should review the call-handler script to be used by the new contractor to ensure the call centre explains to callers that the call centre only calls the contractor, and cannot report on progress.

THCH should require contractors to keep the Customer Services Team (CST) informed about follow-up repairs.

THCH should arrange that during out-of-hours periods, the main THCH number should speak an automated message that informs callers that the caller is being switched automatically to the OOH call centre.

THCH should ask GDIT or any future call-centre provider to send THCH data direct to THCH at the end of each OOH period (instead of sending to LBTH to be re-typed).

THCH should arrange for the repairs contractors to receive callouts from GDIT by email, instead of phone calls.

THCH should ensure that the contract management encourages OOH repairs contractors to do simple repairs such as fixing a leaking joint or replacing a fuse (two examples from the logs where it seemed the OOH contractor could have actually performed the repair on the spot instead of merely making safe). THCH should examine future contracts for OOH repairs contractors and explore with contractors how to ensure that on-the-spot OOH repairs are carried out wherever feasible.

THCH should have OOH repairs as a routine agenda item for contract reviews.

THCH should produce its *own* performance statistics for repairs contractors. In particular, repairs not completed *should* be counted in the performance statistics, and monitored properly.

THCH should consider whether contract management needs to address the quality of repairs.

THCH should ensure a log of CST “quick fixes” (aka “grumbles”) is available for service review.

THCH should supply the call handling company with sufficient information about flats where the residents have special needs or vulnerabilities, to ensure that contractors are made aware if they need to attend one of those flats. THCH should ensure that any new call centre provider is always able to handle calls from non English speakers

Further Observations

There was a major unsatisfactory OOH incident with a THCH new build property. THCH should review new build contracts to ensure that responsibility for handling of OOH incidents before final hand-over is specified to the satisfaction of THCH.

NEXT STEPS

In accordance with Scrutiny Panel good practice, we will provide a copy of our report to THCH Senior Management in advance of our submission to the THCH Board Committee. The recommendations above and the findings that support them are given in table form on pages 10-15 . This table records any disagreement by senior management with any of our recommendations. In the event of significant disagreement that the Board would like to resolve, the Scrutiny Panel members will be happy to participate in a meeting to discuss a way forward. In the event of agreement, the accompanying Action Plan table lists those actions that THCH commits to taking. The Panel will periodically meet to track progress on those commitments and keep everyone informed of developments.

OVERVIEW OF HOW THE SCRUTINY WAS CARRIED OUT

Since the Scrutiny Panel operates independently of THCH, THCH arranged that we could ask the THCH Resident Engagement Officer for THCH information that we needed. Some confidential and legally-protected information was excluded.

- We were able to obtain and review relevant documents: THCH policy documents, THCH internal organisation and responsibilities documents, documents relating to the OOH repair contractors, documents on OOH call handling, spreadsheet data on actual OOH calls, and the THCH service offer advertised to residents.
- We interviewed THCH staff, attended a presentation at the company providing the OOH call centre service (GDIT), and were given a presentation by the lead person negotiating a replacement for the current call centre provider.
- We examined the process of responding to OOH calls and their follow-up using a few anonymous case studies.
- We carried out a survey of resident experience of the OOH service during the last 6 months.
- We also attempted to obtain an overview of the OOH arrangements of other HAs of similar size.

To coordinate these activities we met twice a month for review and planning.

More details are given in the section on our findings and in the appendices.

THE STANDARD OF SERVICE RESIDENTS WOULD LIKE IN FUTURE

This scrutiny focused on the standard of service residents would like going forward. The scrutiny panel identified the following features, some of which are already present, but others need some action:

1. The resident should only have to make one call to report an OOH repair.
2. The repairs contractor should contact the resident as soon as they have been allocated the job to inform them of estimated time of arrival and attend within 2 hours (we acknowledge the cost implications of a shortened response time may be prohibitive).
3. The repairs contractor should further contact the resident if there are any delays or changes.
4. Whenever possible repairs should be carried out at the first visit.
5. The call handling company should work with THCH to gather appropriate tenant profile data in order to cater for those tenants with special needs or vulnerabilities.
6. The call centre should always be able to handle calls from non English speakers.
7. The Rapid Response Team should continue to be available as at present.
8. There should be a streamlined handover between OOH repairs contractor and CST that ensures the CST and the resident are kept properly informed about follow-up visits.
9. There should be a clear statement from THCH about what service standards apply to OOH repairs and guidance on what constitutes an OOH repair.
10. Value for money.
11. Excellent Customer Care.
12. An effective system that logs, and addresses, resident feedback in the form of “grumbles” and complaints.

FINDINGS FROM OUR SCRUTINY

We would like to thank THCH for all the help from staff, and providing a large amount of information we asked for. There were some things we asked for but did not receive, such as: average costs per dwelling for OOH repairs; Key Performance Indicators for the call centre service, benchmarking data; logs of complaints and “grumbles” (NB: a log was provided later, after our recommendations were made); a breakdown of call centre costs into two parts - baseline and call-handling. We were also advised that there would be a report from the Performance Manager on repair performance, expected in October, but we did not receive that. See Appendix 8.

Here are our findings.

1. The basic working of the OOH service

The OOH service runs from 6.00pm to 8.00am including weekends and bank holidays. The call-handling is contracted to LBTH who outsource to GDIT.

When an OOH call is made, GDIT calls the THCH contractors (normally TCL or MNM) to attend the incident. The OOH contractor attends and makes safe. The contract specifies that the contractor should perform a repair if feasible to do so.

In the event of a health and safety hazard that requires clean up, THCH cleaning staff (the “Rapid Response” team) can be called out, and in the event of a large scale incident, THCH senior staff can be called out.

THCH customer service staff should receive reports on OOH first thing the next working day. They log the incidents and issue job numbers for the OOH visit itself, and a job number for a working-day follow up visit where the incident required a repair.

2. Findings from the resident survey of OOH incidents

We sent a questionnaire to over 300 users of the service during the last 6 months, and received 38 responses.

- 36% were satisfied or very satisfied, 39% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the OOH visit by the contractor.
- 61% reported that the contractor did not arrive within 2 hours*.
- 71% reported that a follow-up visit was required to fix the problem. (We think the other cases did not require any actual repair.)
- 36% were satisfied or very satisfied after the follow-up visit, 39% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied after the follow-up visit.
- 60% reported that they were not kept informed about what was happening to deal with the problem.

There were 20 open-ended written responses. Two expressed satisfaction, three made suggestions for improvement, and ten made various complaints about the OOH service. Six used the survey to make complaints that were about the working-day general repairs service and not OOH.

The SP recognises that there were no replies from the majority of those questioned, and therefore that it is unknown whether they were satisfied or not. Nevertheless, the survey results themselves are disappointing. There are high levels of dissatisfaction among responders and there is particular

dissatisfaction with the lack of information given to residents during the OOH by the contractor. Several of our recommendations address these issues.

3. Findings from an analysis of incident logs, case studies and a visit to observe the CST work

THCH supplied an OOH spreadsheet printout listing over 250 incidents during the first 6 months of 2017. We asked for an electronic version so we could sort and categorise (count) the different types of incident, but, despite the printout containing no names and addresses, or other confidential information, we were told we could not have that, due to “confidentiality”. However, we did observe that plumbing issues were the largest category, and electrical problems probably the second most numerous.

THCH also supplied a table listing the various types of emergency issues that THCH had had to deal with. There was no context, so we did not know the period covered (certainly more than one year) and not clear whether this was all emergencies or only OOH. Nevertheless, the table confirmed that plumbing issues (leaks, drains and toilets) were far and away the most numerous.

GDIT supplied a log of calls over a 3-week period in September. We noted a surprising number of repeat calls to the call centre about the same problem – up to 9 calls from a single caller chasing a single problem. The **average** number of calls per incident was 4.

THCH supplied documents about two formal complaints about lack of water lasting over a day (no drinking water, no toilets, no bath/shower) in one block during an OOH period.

The panel examined three case studies to understand examples of how working-day follow-up was handled. One of these showed that the specialist heating contractor (K&T) are contracted to deal with boilers, but seemed to show that they regard adjacent plumbing as outside their remit.

On the day of the visit to observe the CST, there was no report from LBTH at all – so the CST did not know if there were no incidents, or whether LBTH were just late that day.

The SP did not observe any cases of the OOH visit performing a repair on the OOH visit – instead working-day follow-up visits were performed. These are charged separately in addition to the OOH visit.

4. Findings from informal interviews with THCH customer service staff

Two scrutineers from the panel interviewed the Customer Service Manager and the team.

We learned that the OOH logs from the call centre are sent by GDIT to LBTH at 08:00. LBTH then manually *retype* the THCH calls and send a report to THCH. It should arrive by 09:30, but sometimes later. The CS manager reports that they ring LBTH by 10.00 to chase on those days that the report is late.

The OOH contractor sends a report of the incidents they attended direct to THCH. The timing is variable – often before the LBTH data, sometimes later.

The CST staff need both before they can issue job numbers. They issue a job number for the OOH call and another for a working-day visit if there was an actual repair to do.

In most cases where a repair is needed the OOH contractor will take responsibility for contacting the resident and arranging appointments. The CS manager is unhappy with how this works at present, because the contractor does not inform the CS team what has been arranged and what is happening. This sometimes results in the CS team being unable to help residents who call asking what is happening, and can sometimes result in duplicate job requests.

5. Findings from a panel observation of a THCH-Contractor monthly contract review

Two scrutineers from the panel were invited to observe one of the THCH monthly contract meetings with the contractor currently providing OOH service. THCH supplied the observers with the agenda for the meeting, minutes of the previous meeting, and supporting documents – these were performance charts and a collection of emails between THCH and the contractor about repairs that had required chasing. The contract review covers all repairs – OOH as well as working-day tasks – but currently the OOH repairs are not a standing agenda item

There was one significant OOH issue raised at this meeting – the contractor had not attended in time.

The observers noted that the minutes of the previous meeting included a contractor concern that THCH had not provided job numbers for OOH visits in a timely fashion. These job numbers are needed by the contractor for invoicing. This issue came up again at this meeting.

The observers learned that THCH relied on the contractors themselves to produce performance statistics. From experience elsewhere, it should be noted that statistics provided by contractors themselves may be somewhat optimistic. In particular, repairs are added to the statistics (such as % completed on time) only when they are completed, so that a repair that was not completed on time, and is still outstanding, will not be counted in that month's statistics.

The observers learned that THCH had been in serious payment arrears for many months, but had achieved a major reduction in arrears at the time of this meeting.

The observers were pleased to note that a long-awaited IT interface was now imminent, and this will automate much of the administration of invoices and payments.

The observers noted that although the minutes of the previous meeting contained Actions agreed at the meeting, these were not summarised at the end. The observers felt that summarising at the end might help in tracking and monitoring progress.

The scrutiny panel has concerns about the turnover of contract managers during the last year, as this may have led to lack of continuity in contract management.

6. Findings from an informal interview with the THCH Performance Manager

The Performance Manager acknowledged that there is a problem and explained that repairs designated 'Works in Progress' (WIP) is where the problem lies. WIPs are not being monitored properly, and HA has begun an exercise to look at the WIPs; starting with jobs that are 30-days or over and working down. HA said that THCH anticipates that there will be a lot of WIPs to work through, but he was not sure if any are OOH follow-ups. He advised that there would be a report on repairs performance in October, but we didn't receive that.

7. Findings from interview with General Dynamics Information Technology (GDIT)

GDIT are employed by a consortium of 13 members, mainly London Boroughs, but also 2 large housing associations, to supply OOH call centre services. The contract ends in September 2018. LBTH is a member and THCH service is included under their contract.

GDIT call out the repairs contractor nominated by THCH. The repairs contractor is not required to notify GDIT of progress or completion. GDIT is not responsible for keeping residents informed of progress.

GDIT has a team of 37 call handlers. 11-13 work on the nightshift. GDIT previously used language line, however now the call staff happen to be multi-ethnic and speak various languages, GDIT look to staff to translate if necessary. Call handlers work to a script for determining whether an issue is in

scope and what response to make. The scripts for THCH were supplied by Tower Hamlets Homes. There is a charge for changing scripts. Given the low volume of THCH calls, GDIT think it would be difficult to make a business case for a change.

GDIT think it would be more cost-effective if repairs contractors were called out by email instead of phone call. This requires agreement from the repairs contractors (TCL and MNM). Currently GDIT charge £1.20 per minute to call the repairs contractor.

8. Findings from interview with Ealing Consortium contract lead officer

THCH outsource the OOH call handling to Tower Hamlets Council (LBTH). LBTH are part of a 13-member consortium/partnership of 11 councils and 2 large housing associations. The consortium/partnership contract out the OOH call handling to General Dynamics IT (GDIT).

The current GDIT contract ends in September 2018. GDIT are not re-tendering due to making a loss on this service. A new contract is close to being confirmed with a new company that will take over the GDIT call centre IT and staff.

THCH pays significantly more than £12000/year (NB: the SP has subsequently been informed that the current cost is £16000 + VAT = £19200. We are told this is all THCH pays to LBTH, so this includes the per-call charges) for the OOH call handling via LBTH. If THCH wished to join the partnership directly (rather than through LBTH) there would be a partnership fee of £8900 (plus inflation) per year in addition to setup costs and call charges.

The current per-call cost from GDIT is approximately £2.50. Under the new contract, the per-call cost will be £6. The increase is so that the new company can recover the GDIT takeover costs incrementally over a five-year period rather than requiring the consortium to pay upfront. (NB: In appendix 3 it is noted that the *average* number of calls per incident is 4, not 1 as one might suppose, and therefore that the new average call centre cost per incident will be £24.)

In addition to the price for each call from a resident, the call handling service also charges for each call they make to the repairs contractor. MB advised that it would be much cheaper if the call centre contacted the repairs contractor by email. THCH would have to get the repairs contractors to agree to this, and to commit to acknowledging the email within an agreed time (e.g. 10 minutes)

Of the approximately 250,000 calls that GDIT handle, about 50,000 are determined by the call handlers to be “out of scope” – i.e. issues that are not the responsibility of the OOH service. (Presumably a further percentage are detected as “out of scope” when a repairs contractor actually attends a caller.)

THCH still has to pay for the call, even if the issue is out of scope. The officer advised that it is important that residents are educated about what constitutes an OOH emergency.

The call centre is not responsible for keeping the resident informed about what is happening after the repairs contractor is called. The officer explained that if THCH wanted the call centre staff to be relaying information from the repairs contractor back to the resident, there would be extra cost for this.

The officer commented that it would be possible for the THCH telephone system to route OOH calls directly to the call centre rather than requiring the resident to re-dial.

RECOMMENDATIONS TABLE WITH MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

NOTE: recommendations 1-4 are related, because they are all about helping residents understand better the role of the call centre, and the actions of the repairs contractors, but they are recommendations for separate THCH actions.

Recommendation 1

THCH should require the repairs contractor to contact the resident as soon as they have been allocated the job, to inform them of estimated time of arrival. THCH should require the repairs contractors to give residents updates if the response is delayed.

Reason and Information Source

The resident survey revealed 60% dissatisfaction with the lack of information about what is happening in response to their OOH call. See Findings 2 and Appendix 1.

Management response:

Accepted - THCH will review the recommendation with the Out of Hours contractors with a view for this to be implemented by March 2018.

Target date : March 2018

Recommendation 2

The resident should only have to make one call to report an OOH repair.

THCH should review the call-handler script to be used by the new OOH contractor to ensure the call centre explain to callers that the call centre only calls the repairs contractor, and cannot report on progress.

Reason and Information Source

Although it is obvious that the resident should only need one call, **in practice**, they call much more often. The GDIT logs show an **average** of 4 calls per incident and up to 9 calls from a single caller. See Findings 3 and Appendix 2.

Management response:

Accepted - When the new service contract for OOH is put in place we will ensure this is made clear in the script used by the call centre. Improved information for residents on what to expect when making an OOH call will also assist. Given a new service contract will be put in place during the year we will consider the cost benefit gains of making any interim changes to the script. We have noted that the call centre manager at GDIT has said our calls only make of 5% of the total of the LBTH contract and the business case for change given this will be difficult.

Time frame : Link to start of new service Sept 2018

Recommendation 3

In THCH documents where OOH repairs are mentioned, THCH should explain the following:

1. What justifies an OOH callout.
2. The call centre cannot do more than request a visit by a repair contractor.

3. The call centre cannot report on progress – only the contractor can do that.
4. The contractor is required to “make safe” if it’s something he can’t fix, which may mean water or electricity is cut off until the next working day.
5. What the RRT is, and how it works.

Reason and Information Source

It is apparent from the responses to the resident survey that many residents do not fully understand the role of the OOH service, the call centre, and the repairs contractor. See Findings 2 and Appendix 1.

Management response:

Accepted - It is important residents understand the OOH function . THCH will review the best way to provide residents with the recommended information, including updating THCH website, providing information in newsletter etc . The information will

- Define what is deemed to be an emergency
- Define the role of the OOH call centre
- Define the responsibilities of the Rapid Response Team
- Define the responsibilities of the contractor
- Define the responsibilities of the resident
- Define what the OOH call centre will not do

Timescale : End of April 2018

Recommendation 4

The THCH website should have an easy-to-find page that has the same information as recommendation 3.

Reason and Information Source

Websites are increasingly replacing paper as the source people turn to for information. THCH should have full information about OOH repairs on its website. See Appendix 9 for examples to avoid, and one good example to follow.

Management response:

Accepted

As per response to recommendation 3 we will improve the information on the website

Timescale: End of April 2018

Recommendation 5

THCH should require contractors to keep the Customer Services Team (CST) informed about working-day follow-up repairs.

Reason and Information Source

Currently the contractor does not inform the CST what has been arranged for working-day visits that are needed after an OOH visit. This sometimes results in the CST being unable to help residents who call asking what is happening, and can sometimes result in duplicate job requests. See Findings 4 and Appendix 7.

Management response:

Accepted

We now receive Business objects reports which provide weekly updates on open repair orders. THCH to review whether a daily report can be provided on the status of follow on repairs to OOH calls.

Customer service team will now be able to review the status of follow up orders through the contractor interface. Customer services team to be trained on how to do this.

THCH to discuss with contractors process for updating THCH when appointments made and works completed

Time scale : End of March 2018

Recommendation 6

THCH should arrange that during out-of-hours periods, the main THCH number switches automatically to the OOH call centre. Preferably it should speak an automated message saying that the caller is being switched to an OOH call centre.

Reason and Information Source

Currently callers have to write down a spoken number and then re-dial.

Management response:

Accepted

Whilst the separate out of hours number is advertised in the newsletter, block noticeboards and our website we accept that is easier for residents to just remember one phone number for all contacts.

We are making arrangements for our main 202 7780 3070 number to auto divert to the OOH call centre. This will be in place by end of February 2018 and communicated to residents during March.

Time scale : February/March 2018

Recommendation 7

THCH should arrange for any future call centre provider, to send THCH data direct to THCH at the end of each OOH period, instead of sending to LBTH to be re-typed, and should review whether GDIT can do this for the remainder of their contract.

Reason and Information Source

The present arrangement is costly and inefficient. See Findings 4 and Appendix 7.

Management response:

Accepted

The current arrangement is an historical one. THCH have a contract with LBTH to provide an OOH call centre service . LBTH have in turn contracted with GDIT to provide this service through the Ealing consortium. This is a complicated arrangement which is why we identified the out of hours service needed to be reviewed in 2017 and have welcomed the input of the Scrutiny Panel.

In any new arrangement we will contract direct with the OOH provider and through this,

receive the information direct.

Timescale : September 2018

We will review whether any changes can be made in the short term through GDIT and the cost/benefit implications of this .

Timescale : End of March

Recommendation 8

THCH should arrange for the repairs contractors to receive callouts from GDIT, or any future provider, by email (or other free text system), instead of phone calls. (Contractors would have to agree to respond within a set time, and a phone call would be the backup.)

Reason and Information Source

Email is free, whereas phone calls are charged at significant cost. See Findings 7 and 8, and Appendices 4 and 5.

Management response:

Accepted but subject to further investigation

THCH will consider the opportunities and impact of the repairs contractors receiving callouts from GDIT, and any future provider, by email, instead of phone calls.

We will discuss this with our contractors and propose a 3 month initial pilot if they are willing to work in this way. A process will be developed for responding to emails sent and escalation if they are not responded to, within a certain period. The outcomes from the pilot will inform longer term arrangements.

Timescale: April 2018

Recommendation 9

THCH should ensure that the contract management encourages OOH repairs contractors to do simple repairs such as fixing a leaking joint or replacing a fuse on the OOH visit. Future contracts should specify on-the-spot repairs where feasible.

Reason and Information Source

We are told that this is in the contract, but seems to happen only rarely, if at all. See Findings 3 and Appendix 3.

Management response:

Accepted in part - the contract already provides for simple repairs to be undertaken

The majority of OOH contracts are based on make safe and repair where feasible. Our contract allows for 4 hour attendance with repairs being completed with 24 hours. Our current contractors will repair where feasible but this would only be simple repairs. Many OOH calls are more complex and make safe will be the only option, until this can be followed up during normal working hours.

In general where the contractor makes safe and it is a minor issue it will be left until the next available working day and the contractor will make any arrangements such as supplying bottled water, temporary heaters etc. I.e. if an emergency occurs Saturday, the repair will be completed on the Monday

Major emergencies or Health and safety issues including emergencies such as total loss to water or electrical supplies to a flat or block will be managed until resolved and will not be left until the next working day.

Gas boiler breakdowns repairs will be attended and repaired at that time if feasible. If it cant be done, temporary heating would be supplied, until the problem can be resolved.

This recommendation will be discussed with OOH contractors and we will monitor the extent to which 'simple' obvious repairs that we would expect to be done as part of the 'emergency' response OOH are/ or are not being done.

Timescale : Monitor from March 2018 onwards and discuss as part of contract review meetings

We will explore what other Housing Associations provide as part of their OOH offer with respect to wider on the spot repairs and if our current offer is outside of the norm will explore the cost/benefit implications of any changes to the service offer.

Timescale : June 2018

Scrutiny Panel Comment on Management Response

We welcome the plan to compare with other HAs. However, we think the decision should be based on cost/benefit regardless of whether or not it is outside the norm. If the cost/benefit is acceptable, THCH could be a leader, rather than a follower!

Recommendation 10

THCH should have OOH repairs as a routine agenda item for contract reviews, even if there are no disputes.

Reason and Information Source

There was a lack of consistent tracking of OOH repairs. See Appendix 6.

Management response:

Accepted

OOH will become an agenda item for those contractors who attend OOH

Timescale : February 2018

Recommendation 11

THCH should produce its *own* performance statistics for repairs contractors. In particular,

repairs not completed *should* be counted in the performance statistics for that period, and monitored properly.

Reason and Information Source

Repairs statistics are currently not reliable due to omissions. See Findings 6 and Appendix 8.

Management response:

Accepted in part

OOH data cannot be extracted from our performance data as OOH orders are not raised via Orchard. Timescale : June 2018

Automation of responsive repairs is underway, with data being collated through the contractor interface. THCH also run weekly business objects reports, which report on outstanding open orders (ie works in progress) . This is an operational tool for managers and has been in place since October 2017 .

We make clear that the performance indicators for day to day repairs report on completed jobs. Best practice through 'Housemark' is used to define how performance indicators are collated and measured to enable peer benchmarking.

OOH emergency repairs will remain outside of normal day to day repairs reporting as these are managed outside of THCH housing management software and systems are maintained retrospectively, but follow up orders can be monitored through the interface data.

Scrutiny Panel Comment on Management Response

We welcome the news that WIPs are now being monitored. We consider that performance indicators that omit all outstanding (i.e. uncompleted) jobs are not satisfactory, regardless of whether such indicators are currently used in benchmarking. Someone has to start a trend of including uncompleted jobs in performance monitoring. It's only a matter of using numbers that are now available. If Housemark is only reporting figures that omit uncompleted jobs, that does not stop THCH reporting *both* sets of figures (with and without uncompleted jobs) to benchmarking groups. THCH could start a trend!

Recommendation 12

THCH should consider whether contract management needs to address the quality of repairs.

Reason and Information Source

Resident dissatisfaction with the outcome of repairs. See Findings 2 and Appendix 1.

Management response:

Out of scope of this review

This is out of scope of the Out of Hours scrutiny and was discussed with the scrutiny group. The contents of the recommendations are noted and will be picked up as part of the repairs service improvement review which has been on going.

Scrutiny panel comment on Management Response

We picked up resident dissatisfaction with repairs arising from our OOH investigation, so we

think it is at least overlapping in scope. However, we are glad to hear that there is an ongoing repair service improvement review, and we accept that as a suitable response to our recommendation.

Recommendation 13

THCH should investigate whether there are OOH heating contractors who are plumbing-capable as well as boiler-capable and tackle K&T if not. Also check that the arrangement whereby K&T invoice without job numbers is still appropriate.

Reason and Information Source

One of the OOH case studies had a very poor outcome because the heating contractor said they only did boilers and couldn't fix a plumbing problem. See Findings 3 and Appendix 3. Also see Appendix 7 regarding the K&T invoicing.

Management response:

Accepted

This matter is being reviewed with K&T as to what happened on this particular job. Discussions held with K&T confirmed that their operatives should tackle plumbing jobs if called out.

Timescale : completed

Recommendation 14

THCH should have a **log** of CST "quick fixes" (also known as responses to "grumbles") available for service review.

Reason and Information Source

The SP asked for a log of grumbles but was not able to obtain one. Grumbles are a useful indication of service problems that aren't generating official complaints, but may indicate an underlying issue that is not satisfactory. See the beginning of Findings and the end of Appendix 8.

Management response:

This is already in place

The current complaint process, has a quick fix process, whereby potential complaints (grumbles) are responded to with 2 working days

The scrutiny panel were not given a 'log of grumbles' as there had been none in relation to the OOH service. Officers reviewed the list and had there been any in relation to OOH the relevant extract from the log would have been provided to the SP. The log has been provided to the panel on the 22nd January 2018

Scrutiny Panel Comment on Management Response

We received the log on 24 January, thank you. We are pleased to see that the log is available. There was one OOH grumble back in April – presumably an early morning call because the log shows it was responded to the same day - well done. Although it is out of scope for this scrutiny, we do note that many of the grumbles are not responded to within the 2 working days. We hope this being addressed as a separate issue.

Recommendation 15

THCH should supply the call handling company with sufficient information about flats where the residents have special needs or vulnerabilities, to ensure that contractors are made aware if they need to attend one of those flats. In addition, THCH should ensure that the call centre always provides for non-English speakers.

Reason and Information Source

THCH & LBTH are not currently using the call centre capability to record special needs. See Appendix 4. Also it is not clear whether GDIT have a systematic procedure for handling non-English speakers, or whether it depends on which staff are on duty. See Appendix 4.

Management response:**Accepted - but with consideration to data protection requirements**

THCH will review what information should be provided to GDIT and what they already hold.
Timescale : May 2018

THCH to confirm with GDIT its arrangements for dealing with Non English speakers

Timescale : February 2018

Recommendation 16

There should be a distinction between emergency repairs during the week and repairs at the weekend and bank holidays in the property policy.

Reason and Information Source

The property policy says emergency repairs will be “completed” in 24 hours. But the OOH service only promises “make safe”. So, for example, does an emergency on Friday evening get fixed in 24 hours or next Monday? The property policy should specify weekday and OOH timescales separately. See *THCH Property Management Policy issued 1 Dec 2013*. (We were told this is the latest – it is overdue for updating, see item 1.9.)

Management response:

Accepted that our information should be clearer.

Not accepted that there should be a distinction between OOH’s during the week and weekend, but see note below.

The existing Property Policy is out dated as the SP have identified. We have been developing a new Repairs Policy and this is due to go to Operations Committee in February 2018 for approval . The Policy will reflect current practice.

In general where the contractor makes safe and it is a minor issue it will be left until the next available working day and the contractor will make any arrangements such as supplying bottled water, temporary heaters etc. If emergency occur Saturday, the repair will be completed on the Monday.

Major emergencies or Health and safety issues including emergencies such as total loss to water or electrical supplies to a flat or block will be managed until resolved and will not be

left until the next working day.

Gas boiler breakdowns repairs will be attended and repaired at that time if feasible. If it can't be done, temporary heating would be supplied, until the problem can be resolved.

Aligned to our response to recommendation 9

We will explore what other Housing Associations provide as part of their OOH offer with respect to follow on repairs during bank holidays /weekends and if our current offer is outside of the norm will explore the cost/benefit implications of any changes to the service offer .

Timescale : June 2018

Recommendation 17

THCH should carefully consider whether it signs a new contract with the LB Ealing Consortium, and what the alternatives are.

Reason and Information Source

See Appendix 5.

Management response:

Agreed

We have already planned to carry out an appraisal of options

Timescale : June 2018

Recommendation	Action	Target Date	Status
1 "contacting residents"	THCH will review the recommendations with the Out of Hours contractors with a view for this to be implemented by March 2018.	Mar-18	Complete
2a "encourage only one call"	When the new service contract for OOH is put in place we will ensure this is make clear in the script used by the call centre.	Sep-18	Ongoing
2b "encourage only one call"	Improved information for residents on what to expect when making an OOH call will also assist.	Apr-18	Complete
2c "encourage only one call"	We will consider the cost benefit gains of making any interim changes to the script. We have noted that the call centre manager at GDIT has said our calls only make of 5% of the total of the LBTH contract and the business case for change given this will be difficult.	Apr-18	Complete
3 "explaining OOH"	Guides to be developed and put onto Website and within THCH newsletter	Apr-18	Complete
4 "website"	Guides to be developed and put onto Website	Apr-18	Complete
5a "keeping CST informed"	THCH to review whether a daily report can be provided on the status of follow on repairs to OOH calls.	Mar-18	Ongoing
5b "keeping CST informed"	Customer service team to be trained to review the status of follow up orders through the contractor interface.	Mar-18	Complete

5c "keeping CST informed"	THCH to discuss with contractors process for updating THCH when appointments made and works completed	Mar-18	Complete
6 "phone auto switch"	We are making arrangements for our main 202 7780 3070 number to auto divert to the OHH call centre	Feb 18 - March 2018	Complete
7a "call centre data to THCH direct"	We will review whether any changes can be made in the short term through GDIT and the cost/benefit implications of this .	Sep-18	Complete
7b "call centre data to THCH direct"	Future providers will directly work with THCH, rather than through current arrangement with Tower Hamlets.	Sep-18	Complete
8 "email contractors"	We will discuss this with our contractors and propose a 3 month initial pilot if they are willing to work in this way.	Aug-18	Ongoing
9a "promote on-the-spot repairs"	This recommendation will be discussed with OOH contractors to ensure that where feasible, contractors carry out a permanent repair during the call out. We will monitor the extent to which 'simple' obvious repairs that we would expect to be done as part of the 'emergency' response OOH are/ or are not being done.	March 2018 Onwards	Complete
9b	We will explore what other Housing Associations provide as part of their OOH offer with respect to wider on the spot repairs and if our current offer is outside of the norm will explore the cost/benefit implications of any changes to the service offer .	Jun-18	

10 "OOH repairs routine agenda item for contract reviews"	OOH to be added to agendas for contract meetings with OOH contractors	Feb-18	Complete
11 "THCH to have own performance statistics"	OOH data cannot be extracted from our performance data as OOH orders are not raised via Orchard.	Jun-18	Complete
15a "special needs"	THCH will review what information can be provided to GDIT.	May-18	Complete
15b "special needs"	THCH to confirm with GDIT its arrangements for dealing with Non English speakers	Feb-18	Complete
16 "clarity on 24-hour promise and update management policy"	We will explore what other Housing Associations provide as part of their OOH offer with respect to follow on repairs during bank holidays /weekends and if our current offer is outside of the norm will explore the cost/benefit implications of any changes to the service offer .	Jun-18	Complete
17 "alternatives to LB Ealing"	THCH to carry out an appraisal of options.	Jun-18	Complete