

## Covid-19: Good news on lockdown – if we all keep to the rules for now

The Government has outlined a four-step roadmap out of lockdown, which will see Covid-19 restrictions start to lift from 8 March through to 21 June – providing four tests are met.

The plan is cautious to make sure we don't need a fourth lockdown in the months to come. So, the Government says it will need to see:

- the success of the vaccination rollout continuing
- ongoing evidence that people who are vaccinated are less likely to be hospitalised or die
- infection rates kept low enough to protect the NHS, and
- no worrying risks from new variants of the virus.

### We must stick to the rules

We have to keep to the rules at each stage. We still have to avoid catching and passing on Covid-19. If we don't, more people will end

up in hospital and many more people will die. It will also take longer for things to go back to normal.

*To stay safe, remember the following.*

- Wear a face covering when shopping, in other indoor spaces and in crowded areas outdoors.
- Keep your distance – 2m if possible – including in communal areas at your estate.
- Book a test if you have symptoms.
- Stay in quarantine if you test positive.
- Be ready to take up the job when you are offered it (see pages 6-7).



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## Spring Update from Pam Bhamra, Director of Operations

After our long year of Covid-19, it's great news that the rules should gradually relax over the next few weeks and months.

The success of the vaccine roll out is making this possible and many of our residents will already have had their jab. In the centre pages (pages 6-7), we explain why we think you should say 'yes' to a vaccination, if you're still unsure.

For the time being our staff are still mainly working from home, but we are providing you with a full service as far as we can. We

would like to thank you for being so understanding over the past year.

Despite the challenges, we have continued to seek resident feedback and have made changes designed to improve satisfaction with our services (see page 5). Your views and comments are welcome.

Our community centres may be closed for now, but by loaning them out to charities (see page 3), we have been able to contribute to local wellbeing during this difficult period. We look forward to reopening them in future.

We were pleased to support LGBTQ+ History Month in February – as part of our commitment to including everyone in the THCH community (see page 9).

Finally, a couple of reminders. In April, your rent and service charges will rise (see page 3), so be ready to update your Universal Credit account.

Secondly, keep your household safe from fire by keeping to the rules we set out on page 10.



## Update on our services

We are continuing to provide a full service as far as possible. However, some of our services may take a little longer, or be delivered in a different way, while we manage the restrictions linked to Covid-19.

Our staff, partners and contactors have all had to adjust. We thank you for your continued patience during this challenging time.

**Contacting us** While our office is still closed, you can phone or email us, or contact us through My Corner.

**Phone calls** Thank you for being patient during January, when we had technical problems with our phones. We have now upgraded our system, which is starting to improve things. We should be back to normal service levels by the end of March.

**Repairs** We have been focusing on emergency and essential repairs. As the restrictions lift, we will start catching up with other repairs.

**Health and safety** Our contractors are completing essential home gas servicing checks as normal. We are also carrying out the usual health and

safety checks in communal areas. This means testing items such as fire alarm systems, emergency lighting, electrical checks and lifts.

**Managing anti-social behaviour** Parkguard patrols are helping to spot and deter anti-social behaviour in communal areas.

Our Neighbourhood Officers are still investigating reports of anti-social behaviour. However, they can only make essential home visits.

**Moves** We are still letting empty homes, but have changed the way we do viewings and sign ups.

We are supporting mutual exchanges, but please make sure that, if you do a viewing, you stick to government guidelines to make it as safe as possible.

**Community centres** We have to keep our centres closed to the public for now. But we will look at this again in line with Government guidelines.



## Food parcels from Tarling East

Over Christmas and throughout January, we were pleased to loan our Tarling East Community Centre, once again, to Aishah Help.

The Aishah Help charity, which is funded by the East End Community Foundation, London Funders, City Bridge Trust, the Co-op and Remote Medical Relief, provided over 300 food packages over this period to families in need.

Aishah Help have also set up a Covid-19 food parcel fund, so that they can help people in need who are self-isolating or vulnerable due to Covid-19.

To access this service, you will need to show this applies to you and your family. You must also be living in Greater London.

To apply, go to: [aishahhelp.com/foodparcel](http://aishahhelp.com/foodparcel)



## Your rent will rise in April

Our rent and service charges will rise in April, in line with Government guidelines.

This year, we are allowed to increase our rents by CPI (a measure of inflation) plus 1%. We have to use the CPI figure from the previous September in our rent-setting calculations.

THCH's Board decided to increase rents by the maximum amount, which means a rise of 1.5% this year. They have taken this decision

because our rents are low compared to rents charged by other Tower Hamlets social landlords, and we need the additional funding to invest in new and existing homes.

Despite working to keep costs down, some of our services are also now more expensive to provide, so we will need to raise your service charges too. However, we are not adding in costs due to Covid-19.

### Universal Credit

If you get Universal Credit, you need to go online to your account to update your rent details. You should do this on 5 April or soon afterwards – but no later than 19 April 2021.

**Be aware that THCH cannot do this for you!**



### How to update your account

1. Log in to your Universal Credit account online at [www.universalcredit.service.co.uk/sign-in](http://www.universalcredit.service.co.uk/sign-in)
2. In the "where you live and what it costs" section, enter the new rent figure we sent out to you recently.
3. Check your 'UC Journal' to confirm the change.

Don't forget that if you fail to report your rent rise quickly enough, you will get less money than you need to pay your rent.

To find out more about rent payments, contact us via MyCorner, call 020 7780 3070 or email [customerservices@thch.org.uk](mailto:customerservices@thch.org.uk)

If you need support or advice to keep paying your rent, please contact your Income Officer or a Tenancy Support Officer.

# are you covered?

## My Home Contents Insurance

### Designed for tenants in social housing

Your Landlord does not insure your furniture and belongings and personal possessions. However we are able to offer all our tenants the chance to insure their home contents and belongings.

#### Some of the benefits are:

- There are no minimum home security requirements (just a lockable front door)
- Covers replacement and installation of locks for outside doors or windows and alarms, if keys are lost or stolen
- Flexible regular Pay-As-You-Go payment options (fortnightly and monthly premiums include a transaction charge)
- Storm and flood damage is covered (excludes damage caused by frost or anything that happens gradually)
- Damage to fixed glass in doors and windows which you are responsible for is also covered
- Covers theft or attempted theft of contents in sheds, outbuildings and garages (up to £3,000)

Terms & conditions, limits and exclusions apply, a copy of the policy wording is available upon request.

info

For more information contact

My Home on 0345 450 7288

or email: [myhome@thistleinsurance.co.uk](mailto:myhome@thistleinsurance.co.uk)

visit: [www.thistlemyhome.co.uk](http://www.thistlemyhome.co.uk)

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## Resident Forum Feedback

The Resident Forum met in January to look at our estate and customer services performance.

In discussion with our Customer Services Manager, Diane Lander, the Forum welcomed the roll out of the new phone system. They hope to see better call handling in the coming weeks.

They were also pleased that we are now monitoring the quality of our responses to queries and are working behind the scenes to improve customer services generally.

The Forum asked us to make better use of block and estate noticeboards to share information.

At their next meeting, they plan to discuss car parking and major works. They have asked the relevant heads of service to join them.



## Improving resident satisfaction

We're continuing to prioritise your satisfaction with the services you want us to improve. Here's what we have achieved since December.

**Better cleaning standards** We have mixed up our teams and changed their patches. We have also switched to new cleaning products. An enzyme-based cleaner, from an eco-friendly company, is proving to be great at removing stains so far. We are also trying out new cleaning equipment.

**Consulting on our service offer** We ran two focus groups last month to look at our new service offer. We will follow up on their helpful suggestions. We also consulted more widely through a survey. Thank you to everyone who took part.

Our next focus group, in March, will look at our service offer targets. We will then consider all the feedback and share our final service offer in the next few weeks.

**Better monitoring of leasehold sale queries** Using feedback from a recent complaint and in-depth phone calls to leaseholders, we have improved how we handle and monitor our service around leasehold sales. This has included new training for staff.

**Handling queries better** Staff are now focusing on getting you full responses within our target times. When this isn't possible, we will tell you why and give an alternative timetable.



# Covid-19 vaccinations: why we think you should say yes

## Vaccines are going to be critical to ending the Covid-19 pandemic – providing enough people are vaccinated.

As a housing association working in a diverse area, we are worried that so many Black and Asian people are turning down the offer of a vaccination.

We do understand people being cautious. But Covid-19 is a vicious illness, which can kill young as well as older people. It leaves others with Long Covid symptoms, lasting weeks and months.

We are particularly concerned because our Black and Asian communities have a much higher risk of dying from the disease.

In a recent study, 72% of Black people and 42% of Asians said they might not get vaccinated. Eastern Europeans were also less sure about vaccines than white British people.

## The risk of dying from Covid-19

Compared to white British people, the risk of dying from Covid-19 is:

- almost double if you are Black or from a Bangladeshi or Pakistani background
- 1.3 times higher if you belong to another ethnic minority group, and
- as early as April 2020, deaths of Jewish people in London were already 3.7 times higher than normal.

There are many reasons for this – including the jobs people do, how people are living (for example, in larger households), the fact that they are more likely to be struggling financially and the effects of institutional racism.

Some health conditions (including diabetes and high blood pressure) are more common in these communities too.

We want to look at some of the reasons you might be hesitant and explain why we think **all** our residents, whatever your ethnic background, should get the vaccine when it's offered to you.

## Are the vaccines kosher?

Jewish people have been concerned by rumours that the vaccines might contain pork or cause infertility. Neither is true.

An open letter signed by 70 British Jewish doctors in December 2020 confirmed that the vaccines are kosher and that there is no logical reason to fear infertility from mRNA vaccines.



## Are the vaccines halal?

Muslims need to be sure that the vaccines are halal.

Rumours spread on social media and in WhatsApp groups suggested the vaccines might contain gelatine or other animal products, or tissue from aborted foetuses.

None of these things are true.

Imams at 100 mosques confirmed this in Friday prayers on 22 January 2021. They encouraged the faithful to accept vaccines.

East London Mosque also hosted a pop-up NHS vaccination clinic in February. Several hundred Muslims attended for their vaccinations over one weekend.



## Are the vaccines safe?

### Were they developed too quickly?

Getting to a vaccine in 10 months is an extraordinary achievement, when it usually takes years.

It has been possible thanks to plenty of funding and many thousands of willing volunteers taking part in trials.

Since being approved for use, millions of people around the world have been safely vaccinated.

### Are the jabs safe for Black and Asian people?

Fewer Black and Asian people took part in the trials than white people, because they were hesitant. People in these communities don't feel they can always trust that they get the same standard of care as white people.

However, Black and Asian doctors and nurses did volunteer and were also among the first to accept the jab when the rollout started. Many Black and Asian health and care workers have died from Covid-19.

### Are they safe for mothers?

The vaccines were not tested on pregnant women for ethical reasons. So, pregnant women will not be offered the vaccine routinely for now. However, pregnant women who are at high risk of catching and dying from Covid-19 may be offered the vaccine, because the risks are thought to be low.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and the Royal College of Midwives, say there is no cause to worry about your future fertility, as the vaccines can't affect your DNA.

## Getting your vaccination



When it is your turn to be jabbed, you will get a text, letter or phone call about booking an appointment.

The vaccine is free and for everyone, whatever your immigration status.

After your first vaccine, it takes two to three weeks to gain significant protection. Your second vaccination completes the dose and raises your protection further.

**IMPORTANT:** Even after getting the jab, we all need to carry on with Covid-19 precautions until enough people have had the vaccine and the rates of transmission are low.

# Liveable Streets in Tower Hamlets

The Council's Liveable Streets programme is working to improve the look and feel of public spaces across the borough.

The aim of the programme is to make it easier, safer and more convenient to get around by foot, bike and public transport. The Council wants us to stay out of cars, as far as possible, to improve air quality and road safety.

In 2020, they got lots of feedback from residents, community groups

and businesses on how to improve the Shadwell and Brick Lane areas. In March 2021, the project for Brick Lane will go to public consultation, with the project for Shadwell to follow soon after.

To find out more, go to: [Talk.towerhamlets.gov.uk/LiveableStreets](http://Talk.towerhamlets.gov.uk/LiveableStreets)



## Large items to get rid of? Call the Council!

**Tower Hamlets Council is again collecting bulk waste – and it's free!**

Your household can ask for two, free collections each year, providing this is waste from the home you are living at. Each collection can be for five items.

If you live in a block, please put your waste out on the day of collection – and not before – with a note saying this is for Council collection.

When people just dump items, it costs us money and time to get them removed. We spend an average of £10,000 a month on this – which is then added to everyone's service charge.

## Stay safe from domestic abuse: Ask for ANI

Pharmacies with the 'Ask for ANI' logo on display are ready to help people at immediate risk of domestic abuse.

ANI stands for 'Action Needed Immediately', but it sounds like the name Annie.

If you need help, ask for ANI over the counter. The staff will offer you a private space, provide a phone and ask if you need support from the police or other domestic abuse support services.

The scheme is available at branches of Boots stores and at other independent pharmacies.

If you are concerned about a neighbour, family member or friend let them know about ANI.

## Celebrating LGBTQ+ history month

**February was LGBTQ+ History Month, which aims to celebrate diversity and raise awareness, at the same time as combatting prejudice against the LGBTQ+ community.**

While attitudes have improved over the years, people in the LGBTQ+ community still face inequalities and prejudice in today's UK. At THCH, we believe everyone should be free to be themselves and everyone deserves to be treated with respect. We all need to speak out and tackle prejudice wherever we come across it.

If you are being harassed, abused or suffering from anti-social behaviour because of your sexuality, you can feel confident about speaking to your Neighbourhood Officer. You can also get advice by calling Galop on 0800 999 5428.

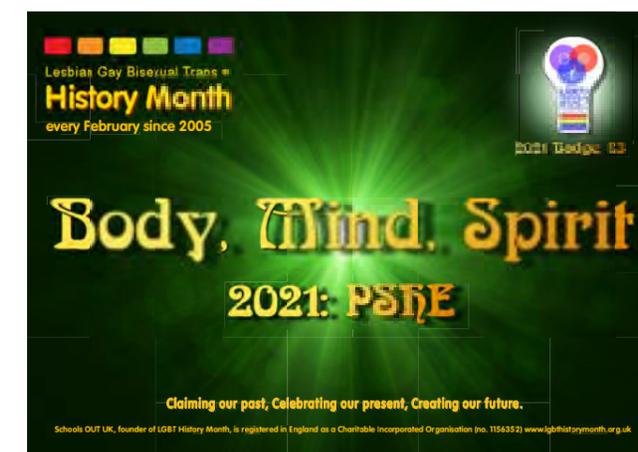
### Advice and support

As an LGBTQ+ person, you can also get general support and advice from the following.

**London Friend** Go to [londonfriend.org.uk](http://londonfriend.org.uk), or phone 020 7833 1674 for support from this mental health and wellbeing charity.

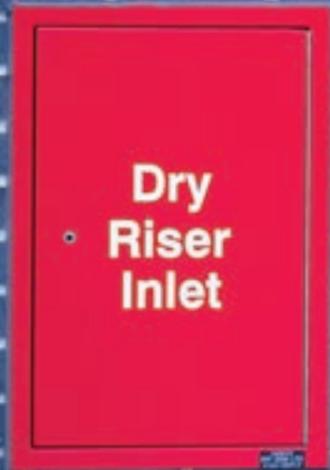
**Step Forward** offers support to young people aged 11-25 years, in and around Tower Hamlets. They offer support and advice, including one-to-one sessions with staff, and access to a safe group. Go to: [www.step-forward.org/about/our-services](http://www.step-forward.org/about/our-services)

**Hidayah** is a national charity which supports LGBTQI+ Muslims. It aims to increase the visibility and voices of LGBTQI+ Muslims, provide educational resources and projects and to assist LGBTQI+ Muslims to access welfare services. Hidayah also campaigns to provide social justice for the LGBTQI+ Muslim community. To find out more go to: [www.hidayahlgbt.com](http://www.hidayahlgbt.com)



# Fire safety: our role and yours

We carry out regular fire risk assessments and works to keep our buildings safe from fire. We need you to be fire-safety conscious too.



As well as checking for fire safety hazards, we also test dry risers annually – to make sure fire fighters would be able to funnel water to a fire – as well as making sure that fire safety equipment, such as emergency lighting and fire alarms, is in good working order.

Your care around fire risks is also very important. Please keep to our rules about the use of your home and follow our tips to fire safety.

## Our fire safety rules

- You must be careful with cigarettes. Don't smoke in communal areas or near entrances and never throw butts from your balcony.
- Don't hold barbecues in communal grounds or on balconies.
- Keep to our rules about whether you can keep a doormat and two potted plants in communal areas (this depends on where you live).
- We don't allow residents to keep personal items in communal areas.
- For more details go to [www.thch.org.uk](http://www.thch.org.uk) to download our booklet on *Resident obligations for fire safety*.

## Your bedtime checklist

- Close all internal doors to stop smoke spreading.
- Turn off and unplug electrical appliances that aren't in use.
- Don't leave your washing machine, tumble dryer or dishwasher on overnight.
- Don't charge mobile phones or other devices overnight.
- Check that your hob, oven and heaters are turned off.
- Put out candles, incense sticks and oil burners.
- Make sure cigarettes are completely stubbed out and never smoke in bed.
- Check escape routes are clear.
- Keep door and window keys where everyone can find them.
- Have a special escape plan for anyone vulnerable.

## No gates and grilles

We don't allow security gates or grilles.

If there were a fire, you could struggle to escape – or the Fire Brigade could be delayed in entering your home.

Recently, some residents have been ignoring this rule. We are now stepping up our action to ask tenants and leaseholders to remove them.

If you do not comply, we will remove them for you.



## Spring word search

Find the counties, for a chance to win £25



Find the 22 counties in the grid – they can be vertical, horizontal, diagonal or backwards for a chance to win £25.

We've started you off with Suffolk so there are only 21 more to find.

If you find them all, fill in your details below and return this page to: THCH Word Search Competition, 285 Commercial Road, London, E1 2PS, by 1 April 2021. Or email a photo or scan of the page to [customerservices@thch.org.uk](mailto:customerservices@thch.org.uk)

A	S	W	I	L	T	S	H	I	R	E	N	M	M	G	T	D	H	J	D
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E	S	C	O	F	U	X	O	D	D	S	H	A	I	Y	M	E	W	K	S

BERKSHIRE

CHESHIRE

CORNWALL

CUMBRIA

DEVON

DORSET

ESSEX

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

HAMPSHIRE

KENT

LANCASHIRE

MIDDLESEX

NORFOLK

RUTLAND

SHROPSHIRE

SOMERSET

~~SUFFOLK~~

SURREY

SUSSEX

WARWICKSHIRE

WILTSHIRE

YORKSHIRE

And we have a winner...

Congratulations to Mr Duncan from Shadwell, who won £25 in December's Christmas-themed word search competition.



Name .....

Address .....

.....

.....

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# Our performance to 31 January 2021

 <p><b>Rent arrears</b> 4.4% (target 2.7%)</p>	 <p><b>Rent collection</b> 98% (target 101.6%)</p>	<p><b>Emergency repairs</b> completed on time 100% (target 99%)</p> 
<p><b>Non-emergency repairs</b> Average days to complete 6 (target 8)</p> 	 <p><b>Repairs completed at first visit</b> 91% (target 92%)</p>	<p><b>Valid gas safety certificate</b> % of homes 99.8% (target 100%)</p> 
<p><b>Calls answered within 30 seconds</b> 87% (target 94%)</p> 	<p><b>Complaints responded on time (Stage 1) in days</b> 11 (target 10)</p> 	<p>We only restarted letting homes in the summer, so are not reporting on these distorted figures. See page 5 for how we are working to improve services.</p>

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.



## Ways to contact us

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

Web: [www.thch.org.uk](http://www.thch.org.uk)  
Email: [customerservices@thch.org.uk](mailto:customerservices@thch.org.uk) (for general enquiries)

Phone: 020 7780 3070

- from 8.30am to 5pm (for all enquiries, or to report a repair)
- from 5pm to 8.30am (out-of-hours emergencies only)

 Facebook: TowerHamlets Community Housing

 Twitter: @THCH\_LTD

 Instagram: @THCH\_LTD

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

## LET'S TALK ABOUT MENTAL WELLBEING

### SIGNPOSTING AND INFORMATION SERVICE

Would you like to speak to someone in confidence and access support to help with your issues?

Are your worries & stresses impacting on your daily life?

Mon & Wed 11.30am-1pm  
(Bengali speaking advisor)  
Telephone: 07871927320

Tues & Thurs 11am-1.30pm  
(Bengali speaking advisor)  
Telephone: 07871927324



#### Important information

This service is only for signposting and information, staff and volunteers cannot provide professional and ongoing mental health support. However, we will do our best to help you by speaking to you about your issues and referring you to the relevant support service.

- [www.bangladeshimentalhealth.org](http://www.bangladeshimentalhealth.org)
- [info@bangladeshimentalhealth.org](mailto:info@bangladeshimentalhealth.org)
- 0771 607 8840 (General Enquiries)
- Charity Number: 1128579

You can also email us on [support@bangladeshimentalhealth.org](mailto:support@bangladeshimentalhealth.org) to request a call back or book an online consultation.

