

Tower Hamlets Community Housing Limited
16 Deancross Street
Shadwell
London E1 2QA
(Tel) 020 7780 3070
(Fax) 020 7780 9739
(Email) michael.tyrrell@thch.org

Gloria Prescod
Consultation and Participation Officer
LBTH Housing
20 Three Colt Street
Limehouse
London E14 8HJ

20th January 2004

Dear Gloria,

Mansford Estate Steering Group
HOUSING CHOICE

Thank you very much for your recent letter, enclosing the questionnaire from the Mansford Estate Housing Choice Steering Group.

In consideration of the questionnaire, I can respond as follows (I really have tried to be as brief as possible): -

1. Organisational Strategy

- 1a Taking on 900 properties plus their residents, the communal areas and provision for the community, such as youth and the elderly, is a huge project. What plans and strategies do you have in place that will ensure that you have the capacity to sustain a consistently high standard of service provision across the estate?**

THCH is a resident led organisation and achieving and maintaining the highest standards in relation to Service Provision is of paramount importance. The THCH Management structure has been designed to ensure a strong management focus for the three Community Housing Offices and to establish a solid framework within which to deliver high quality flexible customer focused services. We have a well developed corporate plan and a scheme of management in place, which ensures accountability at all, levels in the organisation.

We appreciate the task that lies ahead in taking over your estate and

believe we are up to the challenge. Our longer term vision for improving the quality of life for those living on THCH Estates can only be achieved with the active involvement and support of those who live or work on our Estates, and those that take an interest in our organisation. There are many such stakeholders with whom THCH works to bring this vision about. We believe Residents, the Council, business, statutory agencies, and voluntary groups, must all be actively involved in this partnership.

1b Please outline your organisational strategy to ensure proper staffing levels for the tasks of managing and maintaining the stock, working with residents and developing the local community ethos and facilities.

The THCH ethos is to provide local housing management from a 'One Stop' Office. Our Housing Officers work on patch system and generally manage between 200 and 250 properties each. We know from experience this caseload works and that local services deliver results. As stated previously we are a resident led organisation with an active Area Resident Board structure, which we believe has been key to our success.

In particular 2003/4 has been another fantastic year so far for THCH. It was only THCH's fourth year, and yet so much has been achieved, as we: -

- ✓ reduced the amount of rent owed by tenants
- ✓ improved the number of repairs completed on time
- ✓ re-housed a number of overcrowded families
- ✓ continued to re-let empty properties in under 3 weeks
- ✓ completed the refurbishment works, around 2 years ahead of schedule

2. Experience

2a What experience do you have of stock transfers?

THCH was created as a result of stock transfer, following a positive vote by residents. THCH had 1,249 properties transferred to us from LBTH on 27th March 2000, a further 302 homes were later transferred in June 2000 from other RSL's under agreements made with LBTH. In 2002/3 THCH grew by another 200 homes through new build developments. So far it has proved to be a challenging but rewarding experience.

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The transfer has been successful for the following reasons: -

- the works programme was completed in 2003, some 2 years ahead of target;
- we have nearly met all our promises to tackle overcrowding 2 years ahead of target;
- as promised, we opened 3 housing offices to deliver services locally;
- we have our own internal repairs team as well as using traditional external contractors. This has resulted in a greater level of satisfaction amongst our tenants.
- rent arrears have fallen;
- a close working relationship with residents has developed;

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- there is greater involvement, by residents, in all aspects of our service delivery;
- residents and officers now work together to overcome problems;
- less bureaucracy allows decisions to be made without lengthy delays.

2b What experience do you have of managing housing stock in Tower Hamlets?

All our stock is in Tower Hamlets and all our staff from top to bottom in the organisation pride themselves in their vast knowledge of the borough in general and our stock in particular.

We are well aware of the challenges of managing housing stock in an inner city environment and believe as a result of this, we are uniquely placed to transform the Mansford Estate. Our staff are committed to working with residents to provide innovative solutions to complex.

Since 2000, this experience, combined with a new approach in a new organisation, has resulted in improvements to service that could only be dreamed about. We took over in 2000 when Tower Hamlets Council had rent arrears of 9%, empty properties were re-let in 5.5 weeks, and only 80% of repairs were completed in timescale. THCH rent arrears are now 4%, properties are let in 2.7 weeks and 95% of repairs are dealt within timescale.

2c What experience do you have of community development work?

THCH has spent the first 3 years on getting right our housing management service and the refurbishment work. In respect of Community Development work, our work has been restricted to working with the Community so that our residents get the best out of THCH through resident participation. THCH has a dedicated Resident Participation Officer and a well established resident participation structure. THCH puts residents at the heart of decision making processes and believes that our housing association must be resident led.

THCH has recently set up a highly skilled and experienced Community Development Team to ensure that residents are able to play a full and active role in developing community projects on their estates and to compliment our Resident Participation activities. In addition THCH owns and manages a number of community buildings and rooms for community use on our estates. Community Development projects are self funding so that residents face no extra cost on rents or leaseholder charges.

Sustainable communities are at the core of our community development strategy. We believe that community development is best led by those who live on our estates and communities and understand intimately the issues affecting residents. The team has years of experience of developing communities in Tower Hamlets and other London boroughs. The team is one of the largest of any RSL based in Tower Hamlets and works exclusively for the benefit of THCH residents. The team is at present developing a community development strategy for services. The strategy is being written in consultation with residents' representatives and input from other local partners. In addition the Community Development Team is carrying out a

survey of resident's views to prioritise activities according to need.

During stage 3 of Housing Choice, this new team will provide THCH with the necessary expertise to engage residents on the Mansford Estate in discussions on the need for community facilities and community development.

THCH has attracted additional regeneration funding during the last 3 years such as:

- Trees for London for the new park on the Bigland Estate
- Neighbourhood Renewal Fund for tackling Overcrowding
- Neighbourhood Renewal Fund for the Bethnal Green Neighbourhood Manager
- EU Funding for improved insulation
- Cityside Regeneration SRB5 funding for smoke alarms for pensioners

THCH is in an excellent position to secure additional regeneration/community development funding from external sources. The securing of external funds for residents and other community groups is a key task of the Community Development Team. Our Community Development Manager is an experienced fundraiser, raising around £1.5million in grants last year. This is to ensure that finances can be secured with no impact on rents and leaseholder charges.

The development of a youth policy is a consistent theme being raised across THCH estates. THCH Community Development Team has submitted a grant aid application to the Housing Corporation for funding for a 3 year Youth Development Officer. Initial discussions on funding for the post with the Corporation have been very favourable.

3. Improvements Programme

3a What major refurbishment schemes has your organisation been involved in the last 3 years? What type of properties were involved?

Since March 2000, we have been involved in a £42 million programme to refurbish 1249 homes.

As all our properties are in Tower Hamlets and most are ex-LCC, ex-LBTH & ex-GLC properties, we have dealt with the main property types on your estate e.g. tower blocks, and low rise linked maisonette & flatted blocks. We therefore have the experience and knowledge to deal with any problems that may arise.

The schemes involved replacing kitchens, bathrooms and toilets in all tenanted properties. Where needed, electrical wiring, central heating, roofs and windows have been replaced. On some blocks, in order to improve insulation, we have had to overclad the exterior, bringing all of our properties up to Decent Homes Standard.

Our successful handling of the scheme has led to savings, which allowed THCH to go back to several blocks and install lifts, and pitched roofs.

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The external environment, the landscaping and the car-parking areas have been remodelled on most of our estates to create a safer and more pleasant environment for all residents, and to provide additional car parking spaces where possible.

3b How was the work organised and undertaken? Did you use in-house staff or external consultants?

We directed and controlled the refurbishment works ourselves. We had consultants to “master plan” the refurbishment programme, but our own Project Managers have managed each project. In addition the officers from the Refurbishment Team worked closely with residents from each estate.

The refurbishment programme has been delivered through a ‘partnered’ approach with our three contractors. Which has:

- Shortened the programme of works within each flat
- Shortened the overall programme
- Increased the level of resources available
- Eliminated adversarial and costly claims and contract overruns
- Reduced the long term maintenance commitment to the business plan

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3c What is your strategy for the repair and maintenance of your stock with particular reference to planned and major works?

Our strategy is to provide an efficient repairs and maintenance service.

We achieve this by utilising:

- Handypersons dedicated to each local office.
- Local Contractors for smaller jobs.
- A partnered Lift Contractor and Gas Contractor.

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In respect of planned and cyclical works, we believe that the inability of the Council to set aside adequate funds for proper planned maintenance was unfortunate. Our Business Plan has set aside substantial funds, per property, to carry out planned maintenance. This involves a 5-year external painting programme, replacement windows where necessary, flat roof repairs, lift maintenance, etc. Our intention would be to provide an adequate provision for long-term planned maintenance for any future transferred homes.

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3d How would you apply these principals to the specific conditions of the Mansford Estate?

There would obviously be an initial contract required to bring the estate up to a modern acceptable standard and to bring door entryphones, lifts etc up to current standards. After this THCH would add any transferred properties to our planned and cyclical maintenance contracts to ensure that blocks were painted regularly, that lifts were services, entryphones repaired etc, ensure that homes stay in a good condition.

3e Does your proposal involve any new build?

We would look at all opportunities where we think it would be beneficial to the residents of the estate. However, we would want to discuss this with you first. Our experience at THCH has been that proposals are only successful when carried out with the full participation of residents.

The only opportunity we have identified so far is above the garage blocks behind Charles Dickens & Waring Houses. However how this and any other possibilities could contribute to the success of the works programme and business plan would be discussed openly with residents.

3f What further details on delivering the project would you be able to produce by the end of Stage 2?

By the end of stage two, THCH would expect to have surveyed all of the buildings on your estate and with the participation of the residents, we would expect to produce a detailed and deliverable schedule of works, within an agreed programme.

We would have drawn up any proposals that we felt required planning permission and would have discussed them with the LBTH Planning Department to ensure that they were supported.

All of the proposals would have been costed and THCH would have ensured that they were deliverable by the production of a detailed business plan.

By the end of stage two, we would like to have worked up an agreed set of works for each block, which was costed and accounted for in a revised business plan, so that at the point of the ballot each tenant and leaseholder knows exactly what has been promised.

THCH has found that this is so important to residents from our experience from the stock transfer in 2000. So far we have not only been able to meet the promises contained in the letter to residents, but to also carry out additional works that have been requested during the consultation with residents, prior to works commencing.

3g How will you staff and resource the project in stages 2 and 3? What assurances can you give on this? What other major projects do you have on at the moment and in the pipeline, and how will you manage these so as to minimise the impact on the progress of the Mansford project?

THCH's Board has set aside funding to provide extra support to the Senior Management Team. This will allow for additional resources in Housing Management, Administration, Finance and Technical Services to support the project.

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Our £42m refurbishment programme came to an end in 2003 so Housing Choice is now our highest priority. The end of the refurbishment programme has released our experienced staff to concentrate on Housing Choice. Therefore we believe we will be in an excellent position to deliver a transfer.

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As for other projects, we have a further new build development programme spread over the next three years of around £10m. We do not envisage that this will infringe on our commitment to Housing Choice.

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3h What is your estimated timetable for the programme of improvements you are proposing?

When THCH could actually start will depend on the speed of the selection process. If selected THCH would expect to immediately start discussing option with residents and to introduce one of our three partnered contractors. This allows us to develop an agreed programme of works that are affordable and deliverable.

If this process goes well as it did on the other three major refurbishment contracts then I would expect our contractors to start on site within three months of transfer.

The length of the programme obviously depends on the level of works that we agree with residents but I would expect to complete the whole estate within three years.

3i What is your definition of regeneration, as it applies to:

i) Housing

The regeneration of any estate can never be only about one aspect. The physical refurbishment of blocks and bringing them up to the decent homes standard is clearly of paramount importance. So that disrepair cases are resolved. Voids are turned around quickly, roofs don't leak etc. But along with this THCH believes that dealing with anti social behaviour is going to be one of the most challenging aspects of our role. Perimeter fencing of communal areas, door entryphone systems (sometimes two stage), CCTV and concierges are all options that we consider and have installed in our current stock.

But along with this it is important that there are places for young children within sight of their homes and youths to play and exercise. In Tower Hamlets generally there is a shortfall of suitable affordable housing and THCH will explore all opportunities with residents to help deliver specialist homes or housing to deal with overcrowding, as we believe that it is a crucial aspect of good health and education for children and the elderly to have their own rooms. As part of the regeneration THCH also explores opportunities for local labour and training so that a sustainable community is created and maintained.

ii) Health

THCH views the physical regeneration of estates as an opportunity

to help improve the health of our residents. Improving homes to meet the decent homes standards will immediately benefit residents' health and well being as poorly maintained and service dwellings are made into warm and safe homes. In addition THCH works with different organisations to further make homes safe and healthy. For example THCH works with SureStart to ensure homes are fitted with child safe devices, we also work with the London Fire Brigades to ensure all homes are fitted with smoke detectors, which are provided free. THCH produces a monthly magazine, which also carries articles on health and safety in the home.

However THCH believes that the regeneration also gives an opportunity to encourage mainstream health service providers from both the Primary Care Trust and local voluntary sector organisations to provide health care services directly on our estates. THCH uses community facilities as bases for out-reach health care services which can then be delivered on our resident's doorsteps. THCH encourages this through joint funding activity and support for providers.

Each estate THCH manages has different populations and therefore different health care needs. THCH will carry out a door-to-door survey across the estate to ascertain the greatest need and then develop projects to address that need. For example where there is an elderly population THCH will ensure that services for older people are available as near as possible.

iii) Social and community welfare

As with health THCH sees community and social welfare being developed hand in hand with the physical regeneration of the estates we manage. Our community development strategy includes the development of youth facilities and clubs, i.e. home work clubs etc; a women's and childcare strategy; employment and training project; health and healthy eating project; debt advice; arts; information technology; development of social enterprises.

To take account of the differences between different estates our strategy is informed by a survey conducted across THCH estates. Where possible groups are encouraged to form directly on the estates assisted by our Community Development Team. This will help to create sustainable community development. The Community Development Team assists with training programmes to build the capacity of such groups to deliver services. In particular and as a priority groups are trained to fund raise from the many grants that exist from both the statutory sector and charitable philanthropic organisations. Likewise individual tenants interested in becoming community/youth workers are encouraged to get involved by enabling them to attend training programmes. A mentoring scheme should be established to assist this process.

3j How do you propose to sustain regeneration on the Mansford Estate over the next 30 years?

As stated in previous and subsequent questions sustainable communities form the heart of community development strategy. In order to do this THCH believes that community regeneration activities should be led by our residents with assistance from the Community Development Team. THCH will create sustainability in the following ways:

Self financing – Our Community Development Team has substantial fundraising experience. Our Community Development Manager delivers courses for the Institute of Fundraising and has raised over £1.5 million for voluntary sector groups in the last year. THCH has already raised funding to provide courses for organisations working on our estates to learn fund raising skills. Funding raised externally means that residents do have increases to rent or service charges to pay for regeneration activities in the community.

THCH Community facilities are expected to be self financing, with the Community Development Team providing help on organisational competence and business planning to ensure that sufficient income is raised in order for our facilities to flourish. All money generated by community development is ring fenced and is only spent on community development activities.

Partnership – THCH works in partnership with both statutory and local voluntary sector organisations to provide services directly on our estates. Where a need is identified and there is no existing groups or individuals willing to provide such a service THCH encourages service providers to work in partnership, enabling our residents to make the most of existing services.

Community/Youth Workers – Unfortunately there are simply not enough trained youth and community workers. As part of its sustainable community development strategy, THCH will be looking to recruit potential workers to youth and community development training courses. As previously stated we believe that the best youth and community development workers will come from within the communities living on our estates. Those recruited will attend accredited training courses to develop their skills and increase their opportunities to find work in this field. The training course will form part of our volunteer programme. We aim to gain assistance from as many volunteers as possible. Management and supervision of volunteers will either be carried out within projects themselves where appropriate or by the THCH community development team itself. Once trained volunteers will be in a position to both provide leadership to their communities as well as access to employment opportunities.

3k How do you propose to help local youth organisations to build youth/adult leadership capacity in the community?

The THCH community development and youth strategy will have a number of facets. Sustainable communities are at the core of our community development strategy. Our team will work with existing groups as well as

helping to form new groups on our estates to ensure that community development and youth work is robust and sustainable.

Our Community Development Team has had years of experience of building the capacity of voluntary sector organisations. Training will be provided to develop constitutions, financial accounting systems, meeting skills, fundraising and project management. THCH community development staff will meet regularly with groups to ensure that they are acting within best practise for running voluntary sector organisations. THCH will also use its financial resources to secure match funding to ensure the best value for all our community and youth projects.

Unfortunately there are simply not enough trained youth and community workers. As part of its sustainable community development strategy, THCH will be looking to recruit potential workers to youth and community development training courses. As previously stated we believe that the best youth and community development workers will come from within the communities living on our estates. Those recruited will attend accredited training courses to develop their skills and increase their opportunities to find work in this field. The training courses will form part of our volunteer programme. We aim to gain assistance from as many volunteers as possible. Management and supervision of volunteers will either be carried out within projects themselves where appropriate or by the THCH community development team itself. Once trained, volunteers will be in a position to provide leadership to their communities as well as access to employment opportunities.

31 What programmes will you develop to equip local people with skills and employment opportunities within the regeneration process?

THCH wishes to maximise income for our residents across all our estates. We believe the regeneration process offers unique opportunities not only to increase resident involvement but also to increase the numbers into employment. THCH believes this is of vital importance if the regeneration process is to be a success. Apart from increasing the wealth of our residents, THCH believes that by breaking the cycle of unemployment residents' horizons can be broadened, encouraging better citizenship and community responsibility.

Presently THCH works with the Tower Hamlets Local Labour in Construction Group to ensure job opportunities for our residents. However, our Community Development Team is at present developing an employment and training project. The project will allow residents to both gain employment directly on the estates on which they live as well as providing our contractors with an extra way of recruiting workers. Our employment project will recruit and register local people onto a database. Our Community Development Manager is at present seeking funding to pay for a dedicated out reach worker who will interview residents and build up a database of those looking for work and the skills they possess. Those lacking skills will be able to search for training and educational courses to increase their employability. Contractors will be required to meet local employment and training targets (see below). We will also expect

contractors to take on young people as modern day apprentices and train them through Construction Industry Training Board (CiTB). Contractors will be able to use the employment and training project as a mechanism of reaching their targets. It is envisaged that the out-reach worker will rotate around key venues to maximise the numbers of THCH residents on its database. The project will be widely publicised across all our estates.

Our Community Development Manager has extensive experience of setting up employment and training projects having previously set up projects on six estates in Waltham Forest as well as one for a wider SRB area. He has also provided consultancy for two major projects in the London Bridge/Bankside areas of Southwark.

However for residents who are not interested in construction jobs, the project will be broader, linking into existing training programmes across the Borough to increase our residents' skills in a variety of areas. We will also look to provide THCH residents with help to develop businesses, which will have the capacity to bid to run THCH contracts e.g. horticulture on the estates.

THCH is keen not just to equip local people with skills and employment provision within the regeneration process, but to also ensure that local residents have opportunities within the day to day running of THCH. THCH work with Skillsmatch, which is an agency that helps local university graduates to find employment. THCH is pleased to say that virtually everyone who has joined THCH through this scheme has gone on to full time employment with either a local authority or a RSL. Six of THCH's current staff complement, equating to 12% of the workforce, have been employed full-time through the skillsmatch scheme in the last three years.

4. Relocations

4a What is your policy on relocation of residents during building works?

THCH does not have a specific policy on decanting during major works, the necessity for decanting would be discussed with either the block during preparations for any works programme, or with an individual resident if there was a specific need. It is not envisaged that any blocks on the Mansford Estate will need to be decanted.

4b Can you give details of how you would deal with relocations during any planned improvement works?

This has only been an issue on one of THCH's blocks (Coburg Dwellings) where a high level of structural works were necessary. A rolling decant was used in this block to ensure that tenants and leaseholders were kept on the Barnardo Gardens Estate to ensure proximity to friends, neighbour's, schools, doctors etc.

4c Can you make assurances that all necessary relocations will occur locally?

Again this would be subject to there being properties available and the

individuals needs. But in the one case where a block did have to be decanted all residents were rehoused locally. THCH has also had to deal with a major fire adjacent to one of our blocks and the residents of that block that had to be decanted were also rehoused locally.

5. Resident Participation

5a Please summarise your tenant and leaseholder participation strategy, and give some examples of successes and failures.

THCH has a real commitment to resident participation. In fact the Chair of THCH is a tenant. Currently THCH is divided into 3 areas – Shadwell & Wapping, Bethnal Green and Spitalfields. Each area has its own local Housing Office, and also its own “Area Resident Board” (ARB). The ARBs elect 5 of the 18 THCH Board Directors (6 are local Councillors, 6 are independent and 1 is elected by leaseholders). The ARBs meet either monthly or bi-monthly (their choice) to discuss a variety of matters e.g. local team’s performance, issues from residents and policy proposals.

Representatives of the ARBs also get together quarterly to discuss resident issues that affect the residents across all areas. This group is known as the Joint Area Residents Board (JARB).

However, our commitment to resident consultation can be further demonstrated by our success in dealing with residents over the refurbishment programme. As mentioned earlier the programme was completed 3 years sooner than expected. The dialogue between officers, contractors and residents was a major reason for this success. This is not to say that everything went smoothly. With a project of this size there are bound to be some disagreements. However, the constant participation of residents ensured that they had direct input into the refurbishment process. Access to the programme came in many forms: -

- questionnaires
- block meetings
- exhibitions
- door to door surveys
- area / estate meetings

On the downside we still don’t have enough residents actively participating in the ARB’s, especially from ethnic minorities.

5b How do you propose to involve residents in the running and management of your organisation?

As set out in question 5a, residents are able to discuss local issues at the monthly ARBs. Residents also make up one third of the Board, they are directly accountable to their ARB or the Leaseholder Steering Group; and our Chair is a THCH resident.

There are many ways in which residents have participated in the running of THCH. Residents have had input in policy decisions and sat on recruitment panels for staff and contractors. However, for most residents the most

popular vehicle is the ARB. Any issues that are raised at an ARB are fed up to the Senior Management Team of THCH and also via the representatives to a committee or the Board.

We are currently undertaking our 2003/4 Best Value Reviews and residents are actively involved in this process. It is also a specific requirement of our Best Value Brief that the consultants appointed hold Residents Focus Groups.

5c What is the likely relationship between the estate's local board and the main RSL board?

As set out in question 5a, THCH is divided into 3 areas – Shadwell & Wapping, Bethnal Green and Spitalfields. Each area has its own local Housing Office, and also its own "Area Resident Board" (ARB). The ARBs elect 5 of the 18 THCH Board Directors. The ARBs meet either monthly or bi-monthly (their choice) to discuss a variety of matters e.g. local team's performance, issues from residents and policy proposals.

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The ARB is serviced by the Manager of the Local Housing Office and they act as "residents champion" so that issues of concern to residents are taken on board by the Board.

5d How will you ensure local services and local accountability for Mansford Estate residents?

As stated above, the ARB is key to our success in this area. As the local manager is responsible for the ARB they are also responsible for reporting organisational performance to the ARB. We genuinely believe that the best decisions are taken at a local level by those who know most about a particular problem. The local manager will produce regular performance reports o office performance for presentation to the ARB.

5e What decisions would not be made locally?

As explained earlier, each area has its own residents board (ARB). Residents on the ARB are able to discuss and set service issues e.g. cleaning rotas, estate clamping, office opening times etc.

Any issues that affect residents across the whole organisation are brought to the joint meeting of the ARBs.

5f How would the estate's local organisation be run?

This question presumes that THCH is a large Housing Association, covering a large geographical area. THCH is based in Tower Hamlets only, and therefore the organisation is run locally.

The THCH ethos, is that Housing Management services should be provided locally and we therefore have three local housing offices. Each office has an Area Residents Board and all tenants and leaseholders that live in an area are eligible to become elected members of the ARB, with elections being held every three years from amongst all residents in the area.

There will be a maximum of 25 members of the ARB (known as 'full members'), plus up to 5 non-resident co-opted members, who must be selected by a majority of full members.

Membership of the ARB will reflect, where possible, the numbers of tenants and leaseholders on the estates. For leaseholders their proportion of places must reflect their numbers in the area. One nomination from each block or assorted group of dwellings to be sought.

All resident members of the ARB, including those co-opted into vacancies, shall have full voting rights. Non-resident co-opted members do not have the right to vote.

The ARBs reserve the right to remove elected members should they not attend three consecutive meetings without apologies

5g Have you developed a tenant's charter, and, if so, how does this affect existing tenants, especially those in properties with gardens or open spaces?

THCH has adopted "A Charter for housing association applicants and residents" which covers the following issues:

- Your Rights
- Your Security in your home
- Rents & Service Charges
- Improvements to your home
- Sharing or passing on your home
- Exchanging or buying your home
- Consultation & involvement
- Enforcing your rights

All Registered Social Landlords have to abide by this charter for existing or new residents. This is available from all THCH Offices, and in case the members of the Steering Group want a copy of the full text, I enclose 20 copies for distribution to the members.

In respect of the charter effecting tenants in flats with gardens or open spaces, I am not too sure where the question is going, however, I do believe section 6 on "consultation and involvement" gives them comfort on any concerns regarding a proposal that may effect a resident's enjoyment of their garden or open space. This will come through you choosing an organisation like THCH which has a commitment to, and a track record of, resident participation.

5h Have you developed a leaseholder's charter, and, if so, how does this affect existing leaseholder, especially those in properties with gardens or open spaces?

The newly adopted Housing Corporation Charter now incorporates all the issues outlined in 5g above for leaseholders as well as tenants.

5i What opportunity is there for resident participation in the selection, assessment and retention of contractors?

THCH residents have sat on both staff and contractor recruitment panels. THCH is also undertaking a range of best value reviews, and a number of residents from the ARBs have volunteered for the panels we have set up as part of this process. The only requirement we make is that residents participating in this process have been trained in the interviewing process. We are currently undertaking our 2003/4 Best Value Reviews and residents are actively involved in this process. It is also a specific requirement of our Best Value Brief that the consultants appointed hold Residents Focus Groups.

Prior to appointing our contractors a group of residents visited sites they were refurbishing at the time. As well as being able to see first hand the standard and quality of the work being carried out, the residents were also given the opportunity of gauging the views of residents on the estates in question, by visiting them in their homes.

6. Service Delivery

6a Please give details of how you will develop, define, communicate and guarantee minimum standards for:

i) repairs

THCH regard this as a key area and ensure a quality service by:

- Ensuring adequate funding of the repairs service. Each community area has its own budget and is area specific to ensure that each area has sufficient funds to maintain its properties.
- Providing a quick and effective repairs service via a local handypersons scheme. Each area has its own handyperson. This skilled operative is issued with a vehicle to enable easy transportation of equipment and materials. Local knowledge means that little time is lost trying to locate properties and main utility supplies thus improving the response times for call outs. THCH intends to repeat this popular service to all new areas that join THCH.
- THCH has a rigorous post inspection policy in order to ensure the quality of the work carried out. These inspections are carried out by our in house surveyor.
- Ensuring that we meet our health and safety requirements by providing an effective gas servicing contract.

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ii) cleaning and caretaking

In order to ensure that cleaning standards are of the highest quality:

- Each area has adopted, through the ARB, a standard for that area.
- Daily worksheets are completed and handed to the local office which note duties carried out that day.

Residents are involved in the monthly estate inspections. These inspections look at communal health & safety and communal repairs, as well as

cleaning standards. The findings of the inspection are then made known to the ARB.

6b How will you monitor and improve service delivery?

The THCH Chief Executive, Mike Tyrrell, chairs a monthly officers panel, reviewing the following services:

- Repairs
- Cleaning
- Rent Arrears
- Service Charge Arrears
- Right to Buy Applications
- Lettings
- Official Complaints
- Enquiries from Councillors and MPs
- Budgets

This information is then used for reporting quarterly to each Area Resident Board, our Service Delivery Committee, and then the Board.

As a result of this monitoring, we have improved performance on a whole range of services greatly since the transfer of homes from LBTH. Our three local Community Housing Offices, deal with repairs (each office has a handyperson), rent arrears, housing management issues, right to buy, and lettings. THCH believes that the fact that we provide services locally has enabled us to improve services year on year.

Indicator	LBTH 1999/2000	THCH 2002/3	THCH 2003/4 apr-dec
Rent Collected	98%	99%	100%
Rent Arrears	9%	5%	4%
Vacant Stock Available (Short-term)	1%	0.4%	0.3%
Vacant Stock Unavailable (Long-term)	2%	0.8%	0%
Re-Let Times	5.5 weeks	2.1 weeks	2.7 weeks
Lettings to Transfer Applicants	31%	54%	32%
Emergency Repairs In Target Time	80%	90%	93%
Urgent Repairs In Target Time	79%	90%	94%
Routine Repairs In Target Time	83%	94%	96%
Repair Appointments Kept	97%	98%	95%
Repairs Satisfaction Rate	70%	91%	93%

6c What is your complaints procedure? How will this be developed, if necessary and applied for the Mansford estate?

The THCH Complaints procedure is very simple, it is advertised in all THCH Offices in our annual report, and articles on the complaints procedure frequently appear in our monthly newsletter "Update".

The following sets out the current complaints procedure

Stage 1 Formal Complaint made by Resident, former Resident or Applicant on the official form or simply in writing. The complaint is acknowledged and the appropriate Director seeks to respond within 15 working days. So far this year all complaints have been responded to within target.

Stage 2 If the complainant is not satisfied with the response given, he or she can appeal in writing within 15 working days. This is then handled by the Chief Executive (or appointed deputy in the absence of the Chief Executive) personally and he checks facts/action taken and decides whether or not to uphold the complaint or not. So far this year, we have had only one stage 2 complaint, which the Chief Executive upheld.

Stage 3 If the Chief Executive, or appointed deputy, does not resolve the issue to the complainants satisfaction, she or he will be able to ask within 15 working days for the complaint to be considered by a Sub Committee of the THCH Board. This Sub Committee will be convened once a month to ensure all complaints are heard in a timely manner. The complainant will have a right to present their case to the Sub Committee. The Sub Committee will be minuted and the decision of this Sub Committee will be notified to the complainant within 3 working days of the meeting. If the Sub Committee is unable to make a decision and requires additional information the complainant will be advised of this.

Stage 4 If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the Formal Complaints Procedure, they may take the complaint to:- **The Independent Housing Ombudsman Service, Norman House, 105 - 109 Strand, London WC2R OAA. (Tel. 020 7836 3630)**

The question asks about the policy's development. Policy development at THCH is done in conjunction with the relevant Area Resident Boards, to ensure that any policy change has direct input through residents

6d The following services need to improve. Please list up to five bullet points for each, with most important first, indicating how you would achieve these improvements.

The five key areas of the Housing Management service that we would address in order of importance are:

- **Delivery of local services** – THCH believes that residents are best served by the delivery of services from a local office. All staff are generic so most callers to an office, no matter the query, are able to have their problem resolved. Our improvements in repairs, rent arrears, and lettings have all been due to investing in local services.

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- **Estate cleaning** – As explained earlier, each area has a standard which is agreed by the residents and the local office. Residents are then given the opportunity to formally inspect the estate on a monthly basis.

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- **Competent staff** – All staff, before they are allowed to serve the public, receive an induction period. Staff are then encouraged to develop themselves by taking internal and external training courses. In some cases this will include professional qualifications.

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- **Rubbish removal** – THCH staff are aware that all the good works we have carried out to improve the estates and the work of our estate cleaners is regularly ruined by residents dumping large items of rubbish. We attempt to trace perpetrators and to also remove bulk rubbish for collection by our own handypersons.

- **Regular performance monitoring by residents and Board** – Both staff and residents are aware of our targets, and monthly monitoring of performance ensures that any problems which arise, can be addressed at a much earlier stage.

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The five key areas of the security measures that we would address in order of importance are:

- **Secondary Door Entry systems** – As part of making our estates more secure and “private”, THCH has erected boundary fences, to make forecourts of blocks more secure. In addition, some of these forecourts have additional protection through installation of a secondary door entry system at gates in the fences.

- **Warden Patrol Service** – THCH, in partnership with LBTH, has a patrol service that operates between 4pm and 11pm. This patrol service will also respond to emergency calls from residents. The service is currently contracted out to the “Corps of Commissionaires”.

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- **Secured by design homes** – The refurbishment works included where needed, new front entrance doors that are of a higher standard to ensure the safety of the property. THCH will also look at areas on estates that could be better designed to eradicate anti social behaviour. This has already proved successful on several of our existing estates.

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- **Joint Protocol with Police** – THCH work closely with the Police to facilitate the easy exchange of information in order to reduce the

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instances of anti social behaviour.

- **CCTV & Concierge Schemes** – As part of the transfer in 2000 THCH promised several estates that extra security would be put in place. These estates are currently being consulted about the type of scheme they would prefer. These include CCTV and Concierge schemes.

The five key areas of dealing with and discouraging anti social behaviour that we would address in order of importance are:

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- Trained staff working closely with service providers (LBTH, Police, other Landlords) – Anti-social behaviour is not a problem that remains on one estate, but a problem for the area as a whole. THCH will work with the police, the council and other landlords to identify and take action against perpetrators.
- **Remodel communal areas to design out space that is used by those committing anti-social behaviour** - This is the most successful action THCH has taken. We have removed areas where youths congregate, redesigned areas so they are no longer attractive to drug takers and are redesigning blocks so that as few residents as possible have to pass through each door entry system. The best local example of this is at Barnardo Street, where 4 blocks are linked together using 2 staircases. 3 blocks are now having their own staircase built so that the maximum number of users of the stairs and entryphone is four households.
- Policy on timely graffiti removal – Graffiti is either painted over by our cleaners or if on a specialist or brickwork surface, specialist contractors are engaged to remove it. Timing on graffiti removal policy is an issue that has been decided through consultation with Area Residents Boards. Offensive graffiti is removed within 24 hours and other graffiti within 14 working days.
- Mediation Service – THCH can buy in mediation from the Tower Hamlets Mediation Service for instances when 2 residents have an issue with each other.
- Make links with youth groups – Our warden service is making links with youth groups, so that when they tackle groups about anti-social behaviour, we can make youths aware of what is happening locally, to draw them away from our estates, which reduces costs.

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6e How frequently would you decorate the communal areas of blocks?

Following the completion of the major works programme THCH has tendered our 5 year painting programme that will ensure that all internal and external common parts are kept up to the standard that they have just been improved to.

THCH recognises that the biggest failure of past management by Tower

Hamlets Council is the failure to maintain the housing stock. One such area is the decorating of all communal parts. THCH has ensured that money is set aside so that all community parts will be decorated every five years.

6f How will you manage caretaking and gardening?

The “golden age” of caretaking, when a resident caretaker would undertake cleaning, patrolling, gardening and minor repairs is long gone. THCH have tried to recreate this, by ensuring all four tasks are an integral part of THCH services, rather than re-launching a resident service. We are not proposing to have resident caretakers because:

- Past experience of the difficulty of managing a resident service.
- Providing residential accommodation would mean a loss of stock available to residents.
- Changes in society mean that staff tackling misbehaving children for example, would now be attacked by parents who know where they live, rather than be thanked.

Cleaning

THCH employs a cleaner for roughly every 175 properties, whose role is to carry out the cleaning functions only. This means a cheaper service for our leaseholders. They are directly employed and managed by each local Housing Office.

Patrolling

The days of a caretaking patrolling estates are long gone, and cannot be introduced because of possible “backlashes” from some residents. THCH employs the “Corps of Commissionaires” to patrol our estates between 4 and 11pm. They are also able to be contacted in an emergency on the number advertised monthly in our newsletter “Update”.

Gardening

Estate Cleaners are responsible for clearing grass areas, whilst the horticultural contractor is employed for grass cutting, tree pruning etc.

Minor Repairs

All minor repairs are undertaken by THCH's handyperson. Each Community Housing Office has their own handyperson, who not only deals with minor repairs, but depending on their main “trade”, they can deal with more difficult jobs. In addition, the handy persons also undertake the internal decorations programme for senior citizens.

6g Will the staff be on-site, directly employed, or contractors?

As outlined above minor repairs and cleaning will be carried out by THCH's own in-house staff. Patrolling and gardening will be carried out our contractors.

6h Will you guarantee to provide all residents with basic access security, such as locked external doors, intercom systems and CCTV?

As discussed in section 6d security is an important issue on all estates.

THCH has installed entry door systems in all those transferred blocks who want it. We are also in the process of consulting residents on concierge and CCTV schemes. The opportunity to be part of this service would extend to all estates that choose THCH as their new landlord.

6i Do you have a Senior Citizens redecoration scheme?

Yes, THCH has a scheme that offers senior citizens a chance to have two rooms decorated every five years.

6j What is your policy regarding recharges, and, where they exist, how would you ensure that they are minimised?

I am not to sure what "recharging" this question refers to. THCH only recharges those residents who deliberately damage THCH property. If this refers to the cost of major works for leaseholders, this is dealt with in paragraph 10a below.

7. Parking and environment

7a What is your policy toward residents' parking?

Resident Parking is now one of the most contentious issues in managing social housing. THCH have had to deal with a variety of concerns.

THCH has a wheel clamping contract for our estate roads and all cars not displaying permits are clamped. THCH have used the opportunity to remodel our estates to improve the number of parking spaces available to rent, and we would want to discuss this with residents to work out a solution for the Mansford Estate. On one estate, to protect spaces, we have installed resident controlled gates to ensure only residents paying for bays have access to the area.

7b How will you ensure that parking spaces are protected and improved for residents, and provided for visitors?

As outlined in 7a above, we will work with residents to ensure the best local solution for them. This is an issue that we can bring experience of solutions on our other estates for discussion on their suitability for the Mansford Estate.

In respect of visitors, we aim to provide both visitors and contractors parking on all our estates, space permitting. The parking spaces and allocation will be agreed for your estate with your ARB.

7c What is your experience of working with local authorities regarding parking issues, estate road repairs and abandoned vehicles?

Estate road repairs are the sole responsibility of the landlord, and we would look at this during the refurbishment programme. Abandoned vehicles are a perennial problem, for which we have had minor successes, but we are

currently looking at working with the fire brigade on improving matters in the area.

7d What is your approach to open spaces on the estate?

THCH supports the LB Tower Hamlets view that high quality amenity spaces are important to any area of housing. THCH also believes that security on estates is the biggest challenge facing inner London estates. THCH would expect to work with the residents as it has done on our other estates to produce a master plan that improves security, relieves overcrowding and produces quality open spaces, that are manageable.

THCH is committed to no loss of open spaces on our estates. On some estates, THCH has demolished garages and unpopular homes, to enlarge open spaces, so that they can be managed properly, and built on small open spaces, so that overall there is no loss, but a gain of a much better use of land. From our visits to your estate, it is clear that you have some pleasant but poorly maintained open spaces. We would hope to work with you to improve their quality and security.

Local examples of this are on the Bigland and Barnardo Gardens Estates. On the Bigland estate, a play area that has become an anti-social behaviour hot-spot, 25 unpopular flats and garages will be redeveloped to create 17 new family homes, 6 manageable garages and (in partnership with LBTH and Trees For London) a high quality park and play area that will be overlooked by residents, enlarging the open space by nearly 200 sq metres. Another example of this is the Barnardo Estate where a disused car parking area, a run down play area and green space used as a dog toilet, will be redeveloped to provide 24 homes for the Elderly a new children's play area, a doctors surgery and some new private homes with no overall loss of open space, as space that has been built on, has been replaced elsewhere in the scheme.

7e How will you tackle day to day environmental issues, such as, refuse, open spaces, drainage and pest control?

Refuse

THCH has installed Underground Refuse Systems (URS) in blocks with forecourts on estates in Bethnal Green & Spitalfields. This new system is designed to take the smells of the rubbish away from the blocks, to increase rubbish capacity, to stop the use of unsightly overflow bins in the forecourts and to discourage rats. The systems take a full sized black sack, which most residents now use to dispose of the rubbish and generally take down to the chute to deposit there.

Another refuse issue we are dealing with is bulk rubbish. This is one of the modern day scourges of Tower Hamlets. Dumped mattresses etc, cost residents money and it is money wasted, given that the Council has a free removal service. THCH promotes the free service, but also feels we have to deal swiftly with dumped bulk rubbish, and as such it is dealt with by our handyperson services, so that costs are kept down and rubbish removed swiftly.

All our estate cleaning staff are encouraged to search through all dumped

refuse sacks and inspect other dumped rubbish to look for clues as to who has dumped the rubbish. Any evidence found is used to commence legal action against residents. THCH is prepared to take any action within our power, including eviction. Fortunately all those caught so far by THCH in the last 3 years, have not re-offended so we have not had to go any further than issue a number of “notices to seek possession”.

Open Spaces

Initially THCH's maintenance of open spaces was not a success. The contractors we have used were poor, and so were dismissed. We re-tendered the service on a much more defined contract, and the successful tenderer was appointed in consultation with residents. Although it is only a short while since they new contractors were appointed, we are pleased with their work so far.

However we have been successful in redesigning open spaces and securing open spaces during the works programme so that they are much more secure and easier to maintain, now that the works programme is completed.

Drainage

THCH has worked to ensure that all drains under the refurbishment programme have been investigated for a range of common problems. This has reduced expenditure in this area, and we are pleased with the locally based contractors we use for this service.

Pest Control

THCH has stringent procedures to ensure that any outbreak of vermin or pests is dealt with swiftly by our contractors.

8. Policy

8a What will your policy be in regard to existing secure tenants and Right To Buy?

Residents transferring to THCH would have the “protected Right to Buy”, which is the same scheme they enjoy as Tower Hamlets Council tenants. Since 2000, THCH have 155 tenants that have bought their property under the protected Right to Buy. THCH has a proud record in administering the Right to Buy as all Section 125 notices have been served within the 12 week timescale under Right to Buy legislation.

8b What is your rent setting policy?

The Government has introduced a new policy for rents called Rent Restructuring, which applies to all councils and registered social landlords (RSLs). Under this policy properties of a similar size in a similar area will have a similar rent regardless of whether the landlord is a local authority or a housing association. This means that the rents will be worked out in a similar way whether or not there is a change of landlord.

Each organisation has to set a “target rent” for each property according to a Government formula and over a 10 year period it must change its rents to

meet this rent target. Some councils and registered social landlords will have to reduce their rents to meet this target, some will have to increase them, but ultimately all social housing rents in any one area will be the same, regardless of the landlord.

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The "target rent" for a property will be calculated according to a formula that is based on:

- The market value of the property compared with the national average value of housing association and local authority properties.
- London average earnings compared with national average earnings.
- The number of bedrooms in the property.

Rents will change until they reach the target rent. However, the maximum rent increase in any one year is inflation plus 0.5% plus £2 per week. Once the target rent is reached according to current Government guidelines, rents would increase by just inflation plus 0.5%.

The Government considers this policy sufficiently robust to make rent guarantees unnecessary. However it will allow RSLs to offer rent guarantees of up to 5 years based on the rent restructuring framework.

At present, with the Council services like caretaking, cleaning and maintenance of the grounds are included within the amount charged as rent. An RSL will be required by the Government and the Housing Corporation to start separating out the amount of the rent paid towards these services. So if the services provided cost £5 per week for a property and the rent is currently £55 per week, this will be shown as £50 rent and £5 service charge. The amount overall will be the same. Any increase in service charges for existing services would be contained within the overall limit of Inflation plus 0.5% plus £2 per week.

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8c What guarantees can you give with regard to rent levels?

This issue is largely covered by 8b above. Any rent proposals that are developed between THCH and the Mansford tenants will have to be compatible with the Government's rent restructuring policy.

8d What will your policy be in regard to tenant's right to succession?

THCH has the same succession policy as Tower Hamlets Council, which allows succession to under-occupiers in set circumstances, and also "second successions".

8e What is your policy, strategy and proposals with regard to overcrowding?

THCH has been working hard to tackle overcrowding, which has a detrimental effect not only on individual overcrowded residents, but also on child density within our blocks. THCH made a promise to make an offer of an appropriate sized home to everyone of the 178 overcrowded transferring tenants on the LBTH Transfer List in October 1999, by 2005. This promise has now been honoured in respect of the overcrowded families in

Spitalfields & Bethnal Green, and THCH only have 6 in Shadwell to receive their offer. THCH would adopt a similar policy for the Mansford Estate.

8f What is your policy on rent arrears?

THCH has a responsibility to ensure that all rent payments are made in line with tenants' obligations under their tenancy agreements. It is our aim to ensure that all payments of rent are received when they are due.

However, we are aware that many of its tenants are on low incomes and may from time to time have difficulties in making regular rent payments. As a result, tenants may accrue arrears. THCH will offer tenants every possible assistance to help them to overcome difficulties in making rent payments, and to ensure that any arrears accrued are cleared. Such assistance will include the provision of benefits advice with a view to maximising tenants' income, and the establishment of arrangements to enable tenants with arrears of rent to pay off the debt over a period of weeks. Only where tenants fail to make or keep to arrangements for clearing arrears will we consider taking legal action to seek possession of their homes.

8g What are your policies, strategies and proposals regarding anti-social behaviour?

There are a number of key areas that we would address in order to ensure residents do not have to suffer from anti-social behaviour and they are:

- **Secondary Door Entry systems** – As part of making our estates more secure and “private”, THCH has erected boundary fences, to make forecourts of blocks more secure. In addition, some of these forecourts have additional protection through installation of a secondary door entry system at gates in the fences. Successful examples of this are at Argos House in Bethnal Green, Stuttle & Hanbury Houses in Spitalfields and Miles Court in Shadwell.
- **Warden Patrol Service** – THCH, in partnership with LBTH, has a patrol service that operates between 4pm and 11pm. This patrol service will also respond to emergency calls from residents. The service is currently contracted out to the “Corps of Commissionaires”.
- **Secured by design homes** – The refurbishment works included, where needed, new front entrance doors that are of a higher standard to ensure the safety of the property. THCH also look at areas on estates that could be better designed to eradicate anti social behaviour. This has already proved successful on several of our existing estates.
- **Joint Protocol with Police** – THCH work closely with the Police to facilitate the easy exchange of information in order to reduce the instances of anti social behaviour.
- **CCTV & Concierge Schemes** – As part of the transfer in 2000, THCH promised several estates that extra security would be put in

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place. These estates are currently being consulted about the type of scheme they would prefer. These include CCTV and Concierge schemes.

- Trained staff working closely with service providers (LBTH, Police, other Landlords) – Anti-social behaviour is not a problem that remains on one estate, but a problem for the area as a whole. THCH will work with the police, the council and other landlords to identify and take action against perpetrators.
- **Remodel communal areas to design out space that is used by those committing anti-social behaviour** – This is the most successful action THCH has taken. We have removed areas where youths congregate, redesigned areas so they are no longer attractive to drug takers and are redesigning blocks so that as few residents as possible have to pass through each door entry system. The best local example of this is at Barnardo Street, where 4 blocks are linked together using 2 staircases. 3 blocks are now having their own staircase built so that the maximum number of users of the stairs and entryphone is six to eight households.
- Policy on timely graffiti removal – Graffiti is either painted over by our cleaners or if on a specialist or brickwork surface, specialist contractors are engaged to remove it. Any offensive graffiti is removed within 24 hours of detection.
- Mediation Service – THCH uses the services of a professional mediator from the Tower Hamlets Mediation Service. This has proved most useful when 2 residents have an issue with each other.
- Make links with youth groups – Our resident participation strategy includes forging links with the youths on the estate. Our community centres will provide activities in an aim to reduce instances of anti social behaviour. Our warden patrol service also use the strategy of making links with youth groups, so that when they tackle groups about anti-social behaviour, we can make youths aware of what is happening locally, to draw them away from our estates.

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8h Do you operate any schemes such as rent/buy. “Sons and daughters”, etc., for non-priority applicants who wish to remain in the area?

The Council requires that all Social Landlords taking part in Housing Choice that they will be expected to participate in the Common Housing Register all properties that transfer so that tenants who require rehousing can apply for properties across the Borough in the in the same way as they do with the Council.

The Council will also require RSLs to continue to use the transferred housing stock to help meet the needs of residents in Tower Hamlets and assist the Council in meeting its statutory rehousing responsibilities. This means that we will not be able to adopt “local” estate based lettings policies

unless the Council agrees. The Council has all RSLs advised that due to the shortage of affordable homes in the Borough the only local schemes that it will permit are those to reduce acute overcrowding, so that they will not allow a sons and daughters scheme.

In respect of rent/buy schemes, THCH currently has one such shared ownership scheme in Durward Street (behind Whitechapel Station) and we are including more shared ownership schemes in any new developments that THCH are undertaking.

9. Finances

9a What finances are you bringing into the project?

As a new Housing Association that has been involved in a substantial works programme THCH do not have reserves available. All surpluses from the refurbishment programme have been ploughed back into our existing blocks, adding extra works. Many of these were over and above what we had originally promised and were seen as a resident's additional wish list, which has arisen in consultation post transfer. The combination of a well-managed business plan and efficiencies from the 'partnered' works programme, were instrumental in helping to achieve this surplus. In addition our business plan is supporting a new build programme in excess of 300 homes.

Our hope is that by ensuring we repeat the success of our first transfer in 2000, we will produce a surplus on the next transfer. Our aim would be to plough surpluses back into making additional improvements to the estates whose residents vote to transfer to us.

9b What fall back position do you have if any elements of the improvements are undercosted at this stage?

Our experience on the current programme is that some blocks have overspent and others have generated savings, this broadly means that costs have evened out. However, we also provided a contingency fund within the works programme, which we would contemplate again in any future transfers. In addition, just as we have done with our current programme, we would hope to rely on 'partnering' arrangements with approved contractors, which allow for negotiated fixed price contracts based on actual surveys. The earlier in the process we can achieve fixed price contracts the more certain we can be of the final account outcomes.

We would hope to be able to do this during stage two/three with our existing partnered contracts so that we can get a quick start following any transfer.

9c How will you attract additional regeneration funding for the Mansford Estate?

THCH is in an excellent position to secure additional regeneration/community development funding from external sources. The securing of external funds for residents and other community groups is a

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key task of the Community Development Team. Our Community Development Manager is an experienced fund raiser, raising around £1.5million in grants last year. This is to ensure that finances can be secured with no impact on rents and leaseholder charges. He also runs training courses for the Institute of Fundraisers training voluntary sector groups on fund raising techniques. In addition THCH has secured funding from Halifax Bank of Scotland to run fund raising courses for residents and voluntary sector groups working on our estates. We aim to maximise the income for those living on our estates giving communities the help, skills and tools to generate finances to become truly self sustainable.

THCH has already made successful bids and received funding for the following:

- Trees for London for the new park on the Bigland Estate;
- Neighbourhood Renewal Fund for tackling overcrowding;
- Neighbourhood Renewal Fund for the Bethnal Green Neighbourhood Manager;
- EU Funding for improved insulation;
- Cityside Regeneration SRB5 funding for smoke alarms for pensioners;
- LASHG to build new houses;
- Halifax Bank of Scotland funding to increase the financial competence of community groups working on THCH.
- Contractors fund activities such as fun days and firework displays.

In addition many THCH schemes generate financial surpluses. Any money generated is ring fenced and used to fund community development activities across all our estates.

10. Leaseholders

10a What are your proposals for leaseholder contributions to improvements?

Clearly leaseholders benefit, along with tenants, in any improvement to the blocks and the surrounding environment. On THCH's first transfer, regardless of the value of works to any block (in some cases this has been as much as £42,000), the leaseholders contribution has been capped at a maximum of £10,000. This cap was imposed by the Government as part of the Dowry Grant rules for funding part of improvement costs.

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The Government has stated that there is unlikely to be any grant funding and therefore no cap related to these transfers. The level of contribution from leaseholders would also depend on the affordability within the business plan. It should be borne in mind that the extent to which there is a cost above any agreed limit to leaseholders contributions, which is not funded by Grant Dowry, would be borne by tenants.

Following the revision of the Boroughs Policy on leaseholder recharging particularly in relation to extensive and extenuating works THCH,s aim will be to agree with Mansford Estate leaseholders a scope of works that are required and what can be recharged, so that in effect major works charges will not exceed £10,000. We would aim to discuss this scenario in an open

and frank discussion with all residents.

THCH has a good working relationship with our leaseholders through our Leaseholder Steering Group, and we are also negotiating an agreement with the Tower Hamlets Leaseholder Association.

Generally, as a charity, we have no choice but to expect leaseholders to make some contributions to the improvements. However, we would expect to be open and honest in all of our proposals and to take a sympathetic approach to collection and recovery.

10b What payment options will you offer?

THCH will allow leaseholders to pay for major works for 2 years from the date of their first bill and THCH further commits not to charge interest for this period.

Details of how to pay will include: -

- Conversion to a shared ownership lease, where possible and subject to the agreement of the leaseholders lender
- The offer of a second mortgage, where such a mortgage can be secured against the leaseholders property
- Taking out a charge against the property where the leaseholder is unable to make payments
- In extremis, to reduce the charge under general charitable powers
- If leaseholders want longer than 2 years to pay, THCH will consider this, however, interest will then be charged at a rate set by the Director of Finance
- According to circumstances, leaseholders may be entitled to a loan from the Housing Corporation.

Methods of payment that THCH have for major works or service charges are:

- Standing Order
- Direct Debit
- Cheque made payable to THCH Ltd
- Cash payable at THCH Headquarters -16 Deancross St, London E1
- Bankers Draft
- Postal Order

10c What is your policy with regard to the cap for capital works for leaseholders? How will you deal with vulnerable people who cannot pay the cap?

There will be substantial costs involved in undertaking the works necessary to bring the homes up to a decent standard. Our main source of income as a social landlord comes from tenant's rents (leaseholders service charges are not strictly income, they just cover actual costs) and part of this is used to finance loans to cover the cost of repairs and improvement work. The Council and all of the RSLs taking part in Housing Choice believe that tenants' rents should not be expected to subsidise the cost of repairs to

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leaseholders' homes.

As stated in 10b above our aim will be to limited the extent of chargeable works to £10,000 to resident homeowners on Mansford Estate. In the event that the THCH cannot get the rechargeable works down to a £10,000 the following options may have to be considered:

- Reducing the scope of the improvements so that the works received by leaseholders and associated charges will be as low as possible.
- In the rare instances of a positive value transfer, asking the Government to agree that part of the receipt be used to limit recharges to £10,000.
- Not going ahead with the transfer proposal, although this may mean that the Council may be forced to look at other ways of meeting the decent homes standard, such as arms length management which may still result in leaseholders having to pay their full contribution without a cap.
- Where circumstances permit, including some additional form of subsidy within the transfer proposal, such as the building of new homes for sale, to provide extra money to subsidise the £10,000 target.

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10d To what extent is the cost of improvements subject to negotiation and approval with leaseholders?

As stated in 10b THCH will have an open an honest discussion with tenants and residents to establish a deliverable and affordable scope of works that limits leaseholders charges to £10,000.

10e How will you calculate the costs for individual leaseholders?

As the scope of works is being developed, the costs for each block will be agreed so that this is transparent to leaseholders. All THCH current service charges are established in methods agreed with leaseholders and THCH can foresee no reason why this should not be extended to the major works programme.

10f How will you calculate the leaseholder service charge?

Our Leaseholder Steering Group (LSG), which meets quarterly and is open to all leaseholders and THCH jointly, agreed the process for calculating service charges. The method decided on is as follows:

Expenditure Item	Apportioned Charge	Method of Calculation
Communal Boiler Maintenance	block	property size
Bulk Rubbish Removal	estate	per property
Caretaking/Cleaning	estate	per property
Chute Blockages	block	per property
Communal Energy (gas)	block	property size
Communal energy (electricity)	block	per property
Communal Repairs	block	per property

Entryphone Maintenance	block	per property
Horticultural Maintenance	estate	per property
Lift Maintenance	block	per property
Refuse Containers	block	per property
TV aerial Maintenance	block	per property

The apportioned charge is based as far as possible therefore on the actual cost to each block or estate and based on the cost of the actual services agreed and received.

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10g How do your current service charges for your other properties, compare with those made by the Council for similar properties?

The service charge for individual properties is calculated as stated in 10f above. Whilst it is difficult to make exact comparisons because of differences in properties and also the lack of information we have from LBTH on their service charges we do have a comparison for a typical ex-GLC maisonette, which shows that the same services being provided is approximately 15 per cent cheaper with THCH.

	2003/4 Estimate for LBTH property at Norbiton Road	2003/4 Estimate for THCH property at Chapman St
Block & Estate Cleaning	£255.64	£165.15
Bulk Rubbish Removal	n/a*	£14.96
Communal Energy	£10.58	£34.43
Refuse Containers	£10.64	£14.72
Housing Management Charge	£44.60	£75.00
Horticultural Maintenance	£12.77	£25.00
Block & Estate Maintenance	£55.60	£36.58
Entryphone Maintenance	n/a	£11.70
TV Aerial Maintenance	£0.00	£2.70
Administration	£107.00	£60.00
Sub Total	£496.83	£440.24
Ground Rent	£10.00	£10.00
Insurance	£78.69	£57.56
Grand Total	£585.52	£507.80

10h How will you ensure value for money regarding service charges?

THCH is committed to meeting its responsibilities to leaseholders under the terms of their leases, and to provide them with high quality services in the management and maintenance of their homes. THCH is committed to offering the same standards of customer care and the same performance standards to leaseholders as it offers to its tenants.

THCH will provide leaseholders with accurate and timely information about the services they receive, the cost of those services and the amount due in service charge payments. We also set aside a week each year when leaseholders can visit our offices and inspect all bills paid on their behalf.

Leaseholders will also be able to participate in our Best Value Reviews along with tenants and other interested parties.

10i Can leaseholders buy into the services provided by you for tenants?

In principle yes but in practice it does not happen very often. The most common option Leaseholders buy into is the handyperson service, which means they can get their minor internal repairs done by someone who is known and trusted.

10j What is your policy on leaseholder buy-backs?

The THCH Board is considering a THCH buy back policy through the use of Right to Acquire receipts. In addition THCH is bidding for Housing Corporation funding for such a scheme so that THCH leaseholders that wish to sell their homes at Market Value can approach THCH thereby cutting out Estate Agent Fees.

11. Estate Management

11a How will you manage the local housing office, ensuring staff both stay, and meet their performance targets?

The local Housing Office will be part of our Housing Directorate. THCH wants to remain a small Housing Association, managing around 5,000 properties in Tower Hamlets only. We strongly believe that to be any bigger, means that the organisation will “lose touch” with its residents, and as such our ethos is that as many services as possible should be provided locally. The Housing Office managing the Mansford Estate will be responsible for 800-1200 homes and will provide the following services:

- Repairs
- Cleaning
- Tenancy Management
- Rents
- Lettings

This format is successful at all of THCH’s existing 3 local offices, and our vigorous monitoring as described in 4.2 above, through our Performance Review Panel, not only reports to the Board and the Service Delivery Committee, but also to residents through the Area Resident Board.

THCH has an excellent group of staff, with a very low turnover, resulting in consistency and the construction of a very healthy working relationship between residents and offices. Of the 38 staff members transferred from LBTH to THCH in 2000, only 5 have left.

11b What experience do you have of recruitment and staff management?

All staff at THCH have been recruited during the last 4 years. Recruitment for Senior posts and front line staff has included residents on the recruitment panels.

In accordance with TUPE rules, which I understand has been explained to you by PPCR, the bulk of staff were recruited from Tower Hamlets Council as part of the transfer process. THCH has a vigorous interview and testing process for all posts to ensure we get the best staff, which was used during the TUPE process. We will recruit the staff transferred from Tower Hamlets Council under Housing Choice in a similar way.

Our managers come from a background either in local government, housing associations or the private sector. This unique experience together with clear guidelines and procedures, means that we get the best from our staff and take appropriate action when a staffing difficulty has occurred.

11c What guarantees can you give about using local labour as a priority?

THCH uses many local contractors for its repair works and encouraged its major works contractors to use the same contractors so that there was no loss of work for local contractors and a continuity for ongoing maintenance.

As stated in 3I THCH will work with LLIC (the Tower Hamlets Local Labour in Construction group) to ensure job opportunities are available for local residents. For instance our contractors in the Spitalfields and Bethnal Green areas employed local tenants as their Resident Liaison Officers.

11d Will staff managing our estate also be managing other estates?

THCH's Bethnal Green Community Housing Office, currently manages 569 homes. The office is located on the Minerva Estate and manages the following blocks.

Bethnal Green Community Housing Office 10 Minerva Street, Bethnal Green, London E2 9EH Telephone – 020 7749 9830 Manager – Elaine De Diego		
Block	Community Housing Officer	Refurbishment Update
Achilles House	Maryann Murphy	Completed May 2003
Ada House	Sarah Marchant	Completed March 2002
Ajax House	Maryann Murphy	Completed May 2003
Antenor House	Glorin Crawford	Completed February 2003
Apollo House	Glorin Crawford	Completed January 2002
Argos House	Glorin Crawford	Completed December 2001
Beechwood House	Sarah Marchant	Completed July 2002
Hector House	Glorin Crawford	Completed January 2003
Helen House	Glorin Crawford	Completed October 2002
Leopold Buildings	Sarah Marchant	Refurbished 1999
Lysander House	Maryann Murphy	Completed April 2002
Nestor House	Glorin Crawford	Completed June 2002
Paris House	Glorin Crawford	Completed November 2002
Priam House	Maryann Murphy	Completed July 2003
Pritchard House	Sarah Marchant	Completed February 2002
Sebright House	Sarah Marchant	Completed September 2002

THCH believes that each of our offices should ideally manage 800-1200 properties. Therefore if the Mansford Estate were the only additional estate to transfer to THCH in Bethnal Green, then it would be managed from our existing office at 10 Minerva Street.

However, THCH is also being considered by the following estates in Bethnal Green:

- Dinmont (LBTH) Estate – 106 properties
- Teesdale Estate – 390 properties
- St Peters Estate – 161 properties

If all these properties were to transfer to THCH, along with the Connett & Bradley Houses site new build (63 units) and possibly 16 new units in Poyser Street, we would have to reorganise service delivery. If we reach this stage the Board would need to consider the possible provision of a second office in the area.

I hope that the Mansford Estate Steering Group find this helpful, and if any points of clarification are required, please do not hesitate to contact me or Sharon Standell, our Director of Housing.

Yours sincerely



Michael Tyrrell
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

cc:	Housing Choice file Peter Exton Simon Donovan	Anne Ambrose Compton Gustave Elaine De Diego	Sharon Standell Sheila Bradley Rosina Johnston	Derek Young Sirajul Islam
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