

Excellent news for residents...

Two stars excellent prospects

The Audit Commission has awarded Homes for Islington two stars "with excellent prospects for improvement." This follows intensive inspection of every aspect of HFI and its services. This is a major step forward in so little time. The last rating previous to the start of HFI (in April 2004) was one star "with promising prospects for further improvement."

Board Chair Ann Lucas said "With this outstanding result, Homes for Islington can access £157m in government funds to enable us to improve council housing stock to meet the government's Decent Home Standard by 2010."

What this means for residents

Homes for Islington will have £25m more for improvements than would have been possible without the two stars, so more residents will benefit from having works that will bring their homes up to the Decent Homes Standard. HFI will be

undertaking improvements and maintenance work to around 3000 homes in 2005/2006.

The additional money will also mean we can increase the amount we spend on other resident priorities, such as community safety and start addressing those areas that tenants highlighted as priorities in the annual tenants survey such as security, lighting and improvements to paving on estates.

What decides what works will be done?

All properties have been or will be assessed to see what is required to bring them up to the government's standard. Works to be carried out will vary from one location to another. Some homes will be found to need kitchen and bathroom renewals to meet the standard, while other properties will need new double-glazing, wiring, external decorations, cladding, security or other improvements.

Two stars means an additional £25m for improvements



Start on new kitchens and bathrooms

Homes for Islington has already begun installing new kitchens and bathrooms in council tenants' homes across the borough as part of the first round of modernisation works to meet the Decent Homes Standard for those rooms.

This follows last year's pilot programme which involved refurbishing 33 vacant flats to give residents the opportunity to see a sample of the finished project and to display the choices of styles, colours and amenities on offer.

The modernisation programme includes installing upgraded fuse boards and in some homes, new boilers. For their kitchen, residents have a choice of doors, worktops, drawer and door handles and taps.

Bathrooms can be fitted with new bath, toilet and sink, as well as taps, including spray attachments. Both rooms get new flooring, and the walls are painted. In addition, all residents are given energy-saving light bulbs.

The properties getting new kitchens and bathrooms are those, which, after assessment, were found to have kitchens and bathrooms that did not meet the Decent Homes Standard. Kitchens meet the standard if they are less than 20 years old, but any kitchen that does not have adequate space and layout to accommodate sink, cupboards, cooker space, worktop and fridge will be redesigned, regardless of age. Bathrooms should be less than 30 years old.

FEEDBACK

We hope that the news and information provided in this newsletter will be useful and of interest to you. Please help make it so by completing the Readers Survey which can be found on a separate sheet slipped into this Newsletter. We also invite you to contact any member of the editorial team with your comments or suggestions.

To contact any member of the editorial team, write to:

**Homes for Islington News Editorial Team,
Highbury House,
5 Highbury Crescent,
London N5 1RN**

or email your comments and suggestions to
HFInews@homesforislington.org.uk

This newsletter and the accompanying supplement and all back issues are available on the Homes for Islington website. Click the blue 'Publications' tab at the top of the web page and then click the green 'Newsletters' tab on the left.

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Readership survey – Take part and you could WIN a £50 voucher

This newsletter is one of the most important means Homes for Islington has of sharing information with residents. Our aim is to make it relevant and to provide useful information and we hope you have found something of interest in every issue.

Since this is the fourth issue of the newsletter, it seems a good time to get feedback from readers so that we can look to continually improving Homes for Islington News. A Readership Survey form is enclosed separately with this Newsletter which we have designed to be quick and easy to complete.

To encourage your reply, we are offering a chance to **WIN a £50 voucher** when you send in your completed survey. The results of the survey and the winner of the voucher will be announced in the summer issue.

Please complete the survey form and post it to:

**Readership Survey,
Homes for Islington News,**

Room 109, Highbury House, 5 Highbury Crescent, London N5 1RN

Alternatively do it online. Go to the Homes for Islington website and click Readership Survey under 'What's New'.

The Tsunami - How you can help

Homes for Islington manager Jo Knight was on holiday in Phuket, Thailand with her husband when the Tsunami happened. They both survived and were able to help rescue other people and administer first aid to those that needed it. They stayed on in Phuket for another 2 weeks after the tsunami to help with the clean-up and rebuilding process.

Since Jo's been back she's been helping raise funds for a project to help the Royal Thai Air Force rebuild a village in Phuket, which was totally devastated by the Tsunami. "I love this project" said Jo, "It's about providing homes for people who really need them, and we personally know the people from the RTAF who are running the project".

The RTAF is attempting to rebuild a village of 200 homes, and has split this down into mini-villages of 10 homes each. Each home costs 2,500 US dollars, and all the money raised goes directly to buying the materials. The labour is provided by the RTAF, so there are no overheads.

Jo's husband, Pete, is a skydiver who has made numerous jumps with the RTAF in Thailand. Skydivers from all around the world have already raised enough money to build one of the mini-villages, and are working towards raising the money for a second one.

More information is available at www.theworldteam.com

The Tsunami was devastating, but please also remember to continue support for the other charities.

HFI competition winners

Congratulations to Mrs.V.Miron from the Central Street housing area who won the first prize, a £50 voucher, in the Prize Draw Competition that was run in the winter issue of this Newsletter. Mrs.McCullough from the Isledon Road area and Ms.J.Atkinson from the Boleyn Road area each won £25 vouchers.

The correct answers to the questions were

1. The HFI web address is www.homesforislington.org.uk
2. Frankie the Flame is the name of the character that launched the new gas safety campaign.
3. HFI Direct is the new name for the Repairline.



HFI Chief Executive Eamon McGoldrick drawing the winners

Help us put a **STOP** to illegal occupancy

Council tenants are not permitted to sublet their property. If you are aware of any person that is currently living illegally in a Homes for Islington managed property, please let us know. To help us ensure that only rightful tenants occupy properties managed by Homes for Islington, please share any information that you might have about suspected squatters or illegal occupiers.

You can speak to your tenancy management advisor in strictest confidence or call the 24-hour antisocial behaviour hotline of any area housing office and leave a confidential message.

Upper Street	020 7527 5346	Boleyn Road	020 7527 8346
Central Street	020 7527 6247	Holland Walk	020 7527 7477
Isledon Road	020 7527 6567	Lyon Street	020 7527 6853

We will investigate every report that we receive. However, information in regard to any consequent action taken will remain confidential.



YOUR COMPLAINTS HELP US IMPROVE

When one tenant reported damp in their home she was told it was condensation and HFI couldn't do anything about it. But nobody gave her any information or help to deal with the

condensation. She complained and her complaint was upheld. Now HFI has an information leaflet it can give out to help people who have condensation problems in their home.

HFI staff are good at answering complaints quickly. In December nine out of ten were answered in ten days or less. Answering complaints quickly is important but so too is learning from them so we don't keep making the same mistakes.

In another case the relatives of a tenant who had died complained about the way staff at the area office had answered their questions. They were not told the policy and procedure to end a tenancy after someone dies and ended up with a big and unexpected bill for rent.

HFI now has a special information sheet that will be given to next of kin to tell them what they must do to wind up their relative's tenancy.

HFI got 695 complaints in its first six months up to September 2004. A third of these were about repairs or improvement work. 13% were about services to leaseholders. There was a large number of complaints (165) about the company that manages 2,500 homes in street properties, Partners for Improvement in Islington. Most of them were about their refurbishment work and Partners are making big changes to improve their service.

Homes for Islington is keen to learn from complaints. You can make a complaint by telephone, in person, by letter or by email. For details contact

Homes for Islington Complaints Unit

Highbury House, 5 Highbury Crescent, London N5 1RN

Tel: 020 7527 4278 Fax: 020 7527 4201

Email: complaints@homesforislington.org.uk

Or visit our website www.homesforislington.co.uk

Listen Up Islington needs you!

Listen Up, the council project aimed at getting young people more involved in their borough is a children and young people's involvement project that aims to find out what young people in Islington think about the area they live in, so that their ideas can be involved when the council makes decisions about the things that affect young people. Recently there was an event where young people could find out more about services in Islington, the work of Listen Up and ways to get more involved in their area and the issues that concern them, including joining Islington's Youth Citizen's Panel and the Consultation Forum. These two groups provide a chance for young people to have a say in what happens in their borough. If you missed the event but want to find out more about getting involved, call or text Julie Easy on 07815855443, or email julie.easy@islington.gov.uk



Court victories in fraud cases reclaim council homes

Homes for Islington and Islington Council have been successful in reclaiming council homes in two recent cases after residents were found guilty of fraudulently purchasing deceased relatives' homes under the right to buy scheme.

In the case heard at the City and Mayors Court, the council was given a court order to rescind the lease on 15 Carrick House, Caledonian Road, N7 as the home of a deceased tenant had been fraudulently purchased under Right to Buy by the tenant's son, Paul Bettie. The original sale was made void, possession was granted to the council and the two-bedroom flat has been returned to the housing stock. The court also dismissed the application by Mr. Bettie to force the council to pay back the purchase price of £12,000.

In the case heard at Clerkenwell County Court, the court ordered the rescission of the lease on 31 Cornelia Street, London N7, making the sale of a three-bedroom house void. Possession is to

be given back to the council by 14 April on the agreement that the council pays back the £87,000 purchase price.

The court found that William Keogh, the son of the deceased tenant, had made fraudulent representation and had completed the RTB after his father had died.

Homes for Islington Board Chair Ann Lucas said: "Homes for Islington will not tolerate fraudulent purchases of council homes. We thoroughly investigate all cases of suspected fraud and we will always take appropriate action to reclaim properties so that they are available to deserving tenants."

Councillor Jyoti Vaja, Islington Council's executive member for housing and community safety, commented: "The council takes fraud seriously and we will take whatever steps necessary to combat it. Homes are for those in the greatest need and the message is clear, if you fraudulently buy your home from the council we will take action to get it back."

Does your caretaker deserve an award?



Homes for Islington is inviting residents to nominate caretakers for the caretaker of the year awards 2005.

Caretakers play a major part in delivering Homes for Islington's services to residents. HFI and its caretakers are committed to continual improvement in these services. Your feedback can make an important contribution, so we want to know what you think makes a good caretaker.

Please complete the form right and hand it in at your area housing office or post it to:

Caretaker Awards, Homes for Islington,
Room 409, Highbury House, 5 Highbury Crescent, London N5 1RN

If you wish to submit your nomination online, look for the form on the What's New page of the Homes for Islington website. Open the article called Caretaker Awards 2005. Just fill in the simple online form and click the Submit button when you have finished.

The closing date for nominations is 30 April 2005.

There will be one winner and two runners-up. Winners will be announced in the next issue of Homes for Islington News and on the What's New page of the Homes for Islington website.

Prize draw

If you make a nomination, you also have a chance to **WIN a £50**, if you correctly complete the competition questions at the bottom of the nomination form. The answers for the competition questions can be found in this issue of Homes for Islington News. The competition and nominations for Caretaker of the Year are open to Homes for Islington tenants and leaseholders.

The form:

Homes for Islington Caretaker of the Year 2005 – nomination form

Name of caretaker

Name of Estate

Your name

Your address

Your nomination statement: Please state in 25 words or less why you think the caretaker you are nominating deserves to be Homes for Islington Caretaker of the Year 2005:

Competition questions:

The Audit Commission recently made an intensive inspection of Homes for Islington and its services:

- Homes for Islington was recently awarded a rating of
How many stars?
- They also said Homes for Islington's prospects for improvement were which of the following:
Not bad Pretty good Excellent



ESTATE SECURITY – A SAFE INVESTMENT

To meet Homes for Islington's commitment to the safety and security of our residents, an additional £1.2 million has been agreed for 2005-2006. Building on the successes of security schemes in the south of the borough, HFI will install more CCTV cameras and monitoring stations in further blocks and on estates across the housing areas. The following examples show what these systems can do for you.

Finsbury Estate – a crime hotspot transformed

The Finsbury Estate in Clerkenwell was a notorious crime hotspot prior to a major security works programme in 2002. Vandalism, graffiti, petty crime and gangs of youths congregating on the estate were all too common. The estate has been turned around with the installation of fob-activated security doors, individual intercoms in each of the 451 properties and strategically placed CCTV cameras in lifts, lobbies and communal areas which are monitored 16 hours a day.

John Eustace, Central Street Area Housing Manager says of the estate: "It is now a pleasant place to live and a popular estate for people seeking re-housing. Digitally recorded CCTV footage means that we have the opportunity to identify any culprits causing a nuisance and can take appropriate action." Concierge staff are able to monitor all entries into the buildings and record any instances of crime or antisocial behaviour.

Culprit caught on camera finds that vandalism doesn't pay

In one instance, a teenager staying on the Finsbury Estate ripped a CCTV camera from the wall. Footage of the act led to a prosecution for criminal damage and a bill for £815 in damages for the leaseholder who was looking after the teenager.

£1.25 million security scheme at Peregrine and Kestrel Houses

This state of the art CCTV and security system and monitoring station was completed last May. Designed with the co-operation of residents and the police, this system was instrumental in securing the eviction of two residents from Peregrine House who

had caused years of misery for others in the block.

In another incident, a young couple were recorded breaking a glass panel in one of the entrance doors. The parents of the youths were interviewed, shown pictures of the incident, warned about future conduct and recharged the sum of £310 which has since been received and paid back into the repairs budget.

Residents welcome the change the new system has brought to their quality of life. Peregrine resident Jean Trotter, a tenant association committee member, says: "You feel more secure; the place is clean and people respect it more. It has made such a difference."

£1.6million scheme recently started on the Harvist Estate

Following extensive consultation with residents, door entry systems to the four tower blocks and 40 strategically placed cameras will be monitored by staff, also protecting residents of the low-rise blocks. While the costs of maintaining these security systems are borne partly by the residents, employing CCTV footage and added security to combat the large amount of fly tipping and graffiti plaguing the estate, will result in savings by reducing the cost of removal of these nuisances.

Residents' priorities are a key factor in HFI's investment strategy

In 2005-6, £1.5million has been targeted to fund improvements in areas that were identified as a main concern by you in the annual tenants' satisfaction survey. This means more investment in security, lighting, paving and a maintenance programme for door entry and CCTV installations.

Residents will also have a say in spending £250,000 per area during the year as part of the tenant compact programme. Area housing panel representatives will allocate the funding according to proposals made by residents and tenant associations, which will include security works as well as other communal improvements. Homes for Islington is

committed to improving living conditions for all council residents and to work with residents to help create safe secure environments on estates across the borough.



Do you want help to stop smoking?

Giving up smoking on your own is hard work. This is why Islington Stop Smoking Service provides free advice and support to people who want to stop smoking. We can double your chances of quitting for good, so you can start enjoying the benefits of being smoke-free.

For anyone who is interested in stopping smoking there are two new drop-in clinics in Islington:

Thornhill Neighbourhood Project Every Monday	Caxton House Community Centre Every Friday
Thornhill Neighbourhood Project 1st Floor Orkney House 195-199 Caledonian Road Islington N1 0AF 10.30am to 1.30pm	Caxton House Community Centre 129 St Johns Way Islington N19 3RQ 1pm-3pm

No appointments needed.

Quitting smoking is a personal choice. We will help you become smoke free when the time is right for you. With an advisor you can make a quit plan, choose a stop smoking treatment on NHS prescription and be supported through the quit process.

There are drop-in clinics in the at St Luke's Centre, City Road Medical Centre, Fortune Park Campus (all in EC1 area) and Sure Start Mildmay Canonbury East area. Stop Smoking groups are run at Islington Town Hall and Whittington Hospital. In addition, specialist advisers offer advice to Somali, Turkish and Asian groups of people. Islington Stop Smoking Service also has trained pharmacists who can speak various different languages and offer stop smoking advice.

Anyone wanting to attend or to receive more information should call the Islington Stop Smoking Service Freephone 0800 093 9030.



Islington **NHS**
Primary Care Trust

Get trained to be effective - It's free!

There is a new list of training courses available up to June 2005 for tenant and resident association (TRA) and community centre representatives. To find out what is available, contact the Resident Involvement Team on 020 7527 8630/8633/8632.

The training courses are free to all eligible resident representatives. HFI will meet the full cost of any training approved and arranged through the Resident Involvement Team.

Resident representatives participating in any of the training courses described are also eligible to claim for the cost of travel and childcare expenses. More details on this can be obtained by contacting Yvonne Murray in the Residents Involvement Team on 020 7527 8630 or 020 7527 8633.

Beware of bogus callers!



Residents are reminded that it is important to always ask to see identification when someone calls at your home. All our staff and contractors carry ID. If you are unsure about the validity of the ID there will be a number on the reverse of their card you can call to check that they really do work for HFI or our contractors. There have been reports of bogus callers claiming to be from our contractors and asking for money to buy materials to carry out work on people's homes. Please be aware that neither Homes for Islington or anyone associated with us would ask for money on your doorstep.



Homes for Islington residents will see Considerate Constructors Scheme notices displayed when building work is taking place on their estates.

Constructor is the name now widely used to refer to building contractors. You will come across this term in connection with improvement works carried out by Homes for Islington.

“You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs,” as the old saying goes... nor can you improve estates without some inconvenience and nuisance, such as scaffolding and noise.

Homes for Islington and our framework constructors (constructors being the word used now for building contractors) are committed to doing everything we can to minimise these effects on residents. Working according to the good building site practices laid down in Considerate Constructors Scheme is one of the best ways to achieving this.

A code of practice for building sites is good news for everyone

The scheme is a national initiative designed to improve the image of construction through better management and presentation of its sites. Constructors must commit to an 8-point code of considerate practice:

THE CONSIDERATE CONSTRUCTORS SCHEME

- Considerate.
- Clean.
- Respectful.
- Responsible.
- Environmentally aware.
- A good neighbour.
- Safe.
- Accountable.

Inspectors from the Considerate Constructors Scheme will monitor sites for adherence to the code of practice. The inspections are backed up with a site visit report issued to the site manager with advice on any problems found. The inspector will pass on best practice guidance to assist in dealing with problem areas.

Further information

There is more information about the scheme on the Considerate Constructors Scheme website www.considerateconstructorscheme.org.uk Alternatively, you call telephone Brenda Rodney on 020 7527 6222 at Homes for Islington.

If any particular issues arise during improvement works on your estate, contact your resident liaison officer, whose contact details you will be given at the start of works.

The framework constructors referred to above have been through a special selection process, which included local residents. Their selection was based on both competitive pricing and their demonstrating that they can deliver a consistently high level of work and liase and consult with our residents. The contract period is for four years and by signing up to the ‘Partnering contracts’ both Homes for Islington and the constructors will be able to plan our improvement programmes over a longer term with the aim of delivering a high quality service to our residents

Welcome Pack for New Homeowners

Since November all new homeowners who have purchased under the Right-to-Buy scheme will receive a Welcome Pack to help them settle into their new home and understand their relationship with Homes for Islington. The pack will include the Islington Leaseholder Handbook, details of how to report repairs, how to complain, and information about translation services.

New home owners will also be offered a chance to have an informal meeting with a Home Ownership Services Officer to ask questions about Homes for Islington and their service charges.

The Welcome Pack is part of our continuing commitment to customer focus and we hope it will ensure the best possible start for new homeowners.

Problem solved!

Mrs. Ward of Clerkenwell sent us a request for help in connection with her garden problem. She wrote to say that, because she suffers from osteoarthritis, she was having difficulty going up and down her stairs with water for her garden. Many people have difficulty managing this sort of thing, either when they get older or because of a disability.

Homes for Islington News made some enquiries to see whether help could be provided. As a result, Mrs. Ward's tap is going to be changed so that a hose can be fitted to it. This will save her having to carry heavy containers of water.

If you have a disability similar to this, why not contact your area housing office to see whether it is possible to provide a solution. What can be done will vary according to the nature of the location and there may be some properties at which it is not feasible to provide access to garden water or to fit hoses, but Homes for Islington will try to help.

A Blooming Brighter Islington!

Spring is finally here, so why not enhance your surrounding area with hanging baskets, planters or flower boxes. They will give a great deal of pleasure to yourself and other residents. Many residents are already doing this and, as a result, many of Islington's estates look really attractive with planters in bloom. Adding a sparkle to your balcony or communal area will improve what might otherwise be a dull area.



Things to be aware when sprucing up your area are:

- Ensure the access is not blocked to communal walkways or fire escapes.
- Firmly secure planters and hanging baskets so they are not dangerous.
- Be considerate when watering, planting and tending plants by making sure that water and debris do not fall onto other people and their property.

Above all, have fun and satisfaction in the joy that you will create for yourself and passers by!

Dumping ground transformed!



It's hard to believe that only 18 months ago this was a dark corner used only as a dumping ground.

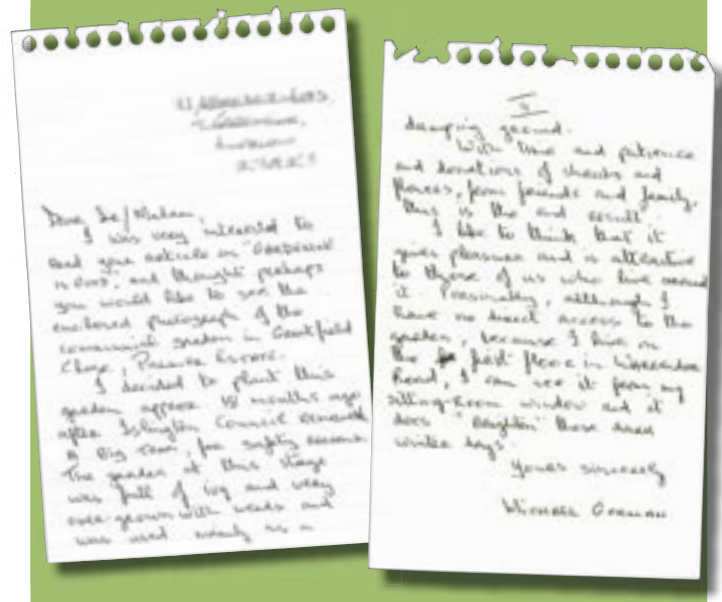
Many thanks to Mr Michael Gorman who sent us a picture of the garden he planted that now benefits him and all his neighbours. He tells us that the opportunity to plant the garden came some 18 months ago when Islington Council removed a large tree that was unsafe. "The garden at this stage was full of ivy and very overgrown with weeds and was used mainly as a dumping ground."

Mr. Gorman reminds us of what can be achieved when people get together: "With time and patience and donations of shrubs from friends and family, this is the end result."

And gardens benefit the gardener and many others. As Mr Gorman says "I like to think that it gives pleasure and is attractive to those of us who live around it."

Homes for Islington News is sending Mr Gorman a voucher so that he can stock up on plants that he and his lucky neighbours can enjoy this spring.

Remember, there is one more issue in which we will be giving a voucher for your garden letter.



INTERVIEW WITH HUGH PARTRIDGE

Hugh Partridge has been on Managed Property Sub Board since the current governance structure was developed (2003). Hugh has been a leaseholder in Central Street area for four years and committee member of the Stafford Cripps Estate Tenant Management Organisation in Finsbury for three years.

Q. What made you get involved with Stafford Cripps TMO?

A. The residents on my estate's 5-year-old TMO like to live in clean surroundings and to feel secure. I was interested in helping because of the self-management and influence on our local environment for us all.

Q. Why did you decide to get involved with Managed Property Sub Board of Homes for Islington?

A. Homes for Islington is a new departure for Islington's housing services, both for residents and HFI staff. HFI's work affects tens of thousands of people, their children and wider families, it procures sophisticated services for them from specialist suppliers and is a large employer.

As a representative from Central Street Area I wanted to help HFI change to focus on the needs of residents it serves and so its staff can take real pride in it.

Q. What are the main functions of the Managed Property Sub Board (MPSB)?

A. Two Sub Boards help main Board do more at strategic board level, and to have greater resident participation there. MPSB deals with directly managed properties. We monitor local services, interview key staff, visit properties, estates, housing offices, and consider and learn from best practice elsewhere, applying local knowledge from, for example, area panels. Many changes are happening, and we constantly challenge staff and management to look at problems in fresh ways.

We scrutinise contractors' work, aiming for better satisfaction for end users.

Thirdly, we focus on areas the main Board cannot for lack of time, such as developing a strategy to help people from all backgrounds and areas have an influence.

Q. How do you think setting up Homes for Islington has benefited residents?

A. Independence has brought flexibility and new possibilities for service improvement, and I see staff enthused by this. Management can now really tap into their ideas and involve them in creating better, more cost effective services. We also have access to additional £157m funding that would not otherwise be available.



I hope residents already see better services and find HFI people they deal with more responsive and helpful than ever before. I think the 2 star rating with "excellent prospects for improvement" just awarded is reflection of HFI's changes.

Q. What would you say to residents who want to get more involved in issues affecting their estate?

A. You can contact or get involved with your local tenant and resident association (TRA) or tenant management organisation (TMO) to find out if your views and ideas are well represented. If you don't have a TRA or TMO HFI can advise on how you set one up. You can also attend or represent your estate/area properties at local area housing panel - details are on HFI's website and at area office, with those of HFI board or sub-board meetings, all open to the public.

Q. How do you see the future for Homes for Islington and its residents?

A. I see HFI continuing to listen, learn and change to become truly customer focused. It already has a clear strategy for the next five years. I hope HFI staff will see the value of their work in terms of outputs for residents.

This is the first resident participation within Islington's housing services. HFI wants residents to take part in decision-making rather than just being passive recipients and we will all be better off when we achieve this.

Groundwork-ing for a better environment

Environmental charity Groundwork is working with tenants and residents groups and Homes for Islington to improve the environment on estates across the borough.

A typical Groundwork project can address issues like community safety, play provision and sports facilities, creating a community garden, estate clear up days, promoting recycling and setting up gardening clubs. The key stages normally include consultation and public events with local residents, fundraising, practical activities such as gardening or art workshops, site supervision of capital works and lastly, but by no means least, a celebration event to mark the completion of the project.

The charity has already carried out environmental improvements on eight estates in Islington and they are currently working with residents on Highbury, Mayville, Bentham, New Orleans, Fairbridge, Manchester Mansions & Hornsey Rise, Cumming and Lower Hilldrop estates.

The scale of projects varies hugely, from a couple of thousand pounds to £½ million. Tenants and residents associations have been successful in securing funds through Tenants Compact and their area housing office. Groundwork is also able to assist with fundraising and provide small grants through the Islington Community Environmental Scheme (ICES).



To find out more, contact Groundwork's

Development Team:

Telephone: 020 7278 1514

Email: camden-islington@groundwork.org.uk

Website:

www.groundwork.org.uk/camden-islington



Case study – Highbury Estate N5

Groundwork has been working with residents for three years to improve the facilities on Highbury estate and address community safety issues. Residents also teamed up with Ben & Jerry's, the ice cream company, last summer to tackle an overgrown allotment and create art features that will be installed on the estate.

Case study – community gardening

A community gardener is helping to develop the horticultural skills of Islington residents by:

- setting up gardening clubs on estates
- organising practical activities like planting days
- providing training in topics like tool safety, planting and habitat creation
- providing access to resources e.g. tools and plants
- organising trips to places of interest

Calling all under-occupiers!

You may be interested to know that Islington Council is currently piloting a Mutual Exchange Scheme for under-occupiers (tenants who want to move to a property with fewer bedrooms than their current property) and tenants whose households are overcrowded. There are a large number of households currently overcrowded who have relatively little chance of rehousing through the home connection scheme. The rehousing section is therefore targeting under-occupiers to match them with overcrowded households in order to identify possible

Mutual Exchanges. If both parties are interested then a viewing will be arranged via the Council.

The benefits to under-occupiers are:

- **You will still be entitled to the under-occupation grant which is currently £500 per room you give up and up to £300 for removal costs.**
- **You may still be able to under-occupy your home e.g. A couple currently residing in a 3-bed property would only qualify for a 1-bed on Home Connections. However, moving by**

mutual exchange permits an extra bedroom so you may still be able to exchange to a 2-bed property.

- **Your name and address will only be known to the council and will not be given to any possible exchange partner without your full consent.**

You are not obliged to take part in any mutual exchange if you are not interested in the property.

If you are currently under-occupying and would like more information on Under-occupation or the pilot Mutual Exchange scheme, please contact 020 7527 5174 / 4837 / 4350.

ACCESSIBILITY ON THE WEB - CAN YOU SEE US?

More and more people are turning to the Internet for information and to access services. This is why Homes for Islington made setting up a website a high priority. In the future you will be able to get more and better information and access more services by getting onto the HFI website.

Many people have accessibility problems when it comes to using a computer and Homes for Islington is committed to making our site as accessible as possible.

What do we mean by accessibility?

Not everyone is able to use a computer in the same way. Blindness or motor disabilities may mean that they cannot see the screen or, even if they can, cannot use a mouse. A visual impairment, such as partial sight or colour blindness, will make it difficult to see a computer screen in the usual way. A hearing impairment will be limiting on sites where sound is important, while movement on a screen and the amount of time things are visible may have an effect on anyone with epilepsy, dyslexia or other problems.

What can you do if you have any of these problems?

If larger text would help, the solution is usually easy. Go to the Menu at the top of your web browser and click View to make the items on that menu drop down. Then select Text Size and choose a larger size. This is shown right.

Homes for Islington has already taken steps to make our site more accessible.

- You can choose a text only version of the site. To do this, click the link in the upper right-hand corner of each web page.



- Little tags carry labels describing pictures and graphic images on the pages.
- Links, which take you to another part of the page, to a new page or to another site are labelled to describe what kind of content they will connect to.
- Homes for Islington is drawing up a plan to ensure that our website conforms to the key guidelines set by the Web Accessibility Initiative. As we progress with our plan we will be looking to test our site and get feedback from users.

More information about this will be published in future issues of this newsletter. In the meantime, if you have any questions about accessibility, you can contact the HFI website using the email address given on the homepage. That address is there specifically for questions relating to the HFI website.

If you want more information about accessibility you can look on the W3C website at www.w3.org and click their link for Accessibility. W3C is the World Wide Web Consortium. It "develops specifications, guidelines, software, and tools to lead the Web to its full potential." Their director is Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the web.

Free computer training

In the last issue (winter 2004) of this newsletter we told you about free training in Islington. The telephone number for Islington Online is 020 7527 5936. If you telephone this number and explain where you live, they can tell you how to contact a center near you. They are publishing a new brochure and you may wish to ask how you can get a copy. Alternatively, you can go to the following website: www.learneasy.net and click on the link there for Islington

Cyber rent and service charge payments

Tenants and Leaseholders are already making extensive use of the new Internet payment facility through the Homes for Islington website. Leaseholders are now also able to pay their service charges by direct debit. A direct debit form is being sent to all leaseholders with the 2005/2006 invoice this month.

Since November, over 500 rent and service charge payments have been received. As a mark of the new system's convenience, a considerable number of payments were made over the Christmas holiday period when other payment facilities were closed.