

# Islington Home Owner



Spring 2007



## What's Inside...

- New policy on erecting aerials & satellite dishes
- Costs for communal repairs available
- Changes at Home Ownership's office



Five Star Health & Safety  
Management System Audit  
★★★★★ Awarded 2006  
BRITISH SAFETY COUNCIL



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

# Giving you access to repair costs

Homes for Islington is improving the way service charge payers are told about communal repairs



Currently, service charge payers are only informed of the day-to-day repairs carried out to their estate and the communal parts of their building when they get their actual annual service charge bill six months after the financial year has ended. This is standard practice for leaseholders of local councils. Repairs to the estate are known as “estate repairs” and repairs to the communal parts of the building are known as “block repairs”. Service charge payers are not consulted about these repairs as the total estimated cost of each repair divided by the number of properties that will benefit from the work is less than £250, and this is the threshold for consultation.

## More accessible costings

Homes for Islington wants to improve the service we provide to our customers. Consequently, we will be able to provide you with the indicative cost of the estate and block repairs that were carried out three months before.



From July you can request details of any repair costs to your building and estate that were carried out in April. In August we will be able to give you repair costs for works carried out in May, and so on. This service will make it easier for you to get information about a repair when it is still a recent event, rather than up to 18 months after it was carried out, which is the case at the moment. We hope that this information will allow you to budget your financial obligations with more certainty. The repair charges are the hardest costs to predict, as they are generally unplanned, responsive repairs.

For information about your estate and block repairs, contact the service charge calculation team on: 020 7527 7728, 020 7527 7813 or 020 7527 2605.



# Providing services to leaseholders

Kier Islington are surveying leaseholders about services they could provide

Kier Islington is a 10 year joint venture between the Kier Group and Islington Council. They carry out repairs and maintenance to the properties managed by HFI. Part of HFI's business plan is for our partners to provide services directly to the leasehold properties we manage. Kier Islington have proposed to offer services to leaseholders, such as carrying out internal repairs, plumbing work and servicing boilers. These are all types of work that leaseholders are responsible for either doing or arranging to have done. Leaseholders would pay Kier Islington directly.

## Benefits to leaseholders

The benefit to leaseholders will be twofold. Firstly, as Kier Islington are potentially providing services to a new customer base of over 8,500 home owners, their prices will be competitive. Secondly, as Kier is a large company, this provides accountability that customers would not necessarily get if they were to choose an unknown contractor from a local directory or newspaper.

In order to gauge the level of requirement for the service, Kier Islington will be carrying out a survey of all leaseholders. You will be receiving a brochure and survey form outlining the proposed service Kier Islington will provide; please fill out the survey form and return it to Kier Islington. It is anticipated, subject to the results of the survey, that a service will be made available later this year, and once it is, it will be fully advertised. When this happens leaseholders will not be any under any obligation to use Kier Islington. HFI are also exploring similar opportunities with British Gas.



## Gas safety checks

Leaseholders are responsible for gas appliance maintenance

As a leaseholder you are responsible for the maintenance of all gas appliances and flues in your property and you are required to have them checked for safety. Not only is this still the case if you have sublet your property, but as a landlord you actually have a legal responsibility to your tenant under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998. You must ensure that an annual safety check is carried out on each appliance and/or flue that you provide for tenants' use, and that a record of each safety check is kept for 2 years. Further information can be found at the HSE's website [www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic/gas\\_law.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic/gas_law.htm)

## CORGI registered installations

A CORGI registered installer with the required competence to do the particular work should always be used. By law, anyone, whether an employer or self-employed, running a business who carries out work on a gas appliance/fitting must be CORGI registered, and any individual doing gas work must be competent to do it safely. DIY gas work could be dangerous and is likely to be illegal. To find a CORGI registered installer in your area go to [www.corgi-gas-safety.com](http://www.corgi-gas-safety.com). Alternatively, telephone CORGI customer services on 0870 401 2300.

There has been a change to the policy on aerials and satellite dishes to bring costs in line with tenants



There is a clause in the standard Islington lease that states that leaseholders must not: "erect or cause to be erected to the exterior of the demised premises or the Building any form of television aerial or receiving device and not to exhibit on the exterior of the demised premises or in the windows thereof any nameplate placard announcement of any description."

Previously, this has meant that if a leaseholder wanted to have an aerial or satellite dish, they had to have the terms of their lease varied before they could apply to their local Area Housing Office for permission. In some situations planning permission is also required before a dish can be erected. In order for a lease to be varied, a leaseholder needs to obtain a Deed of Variation from Islington Council's Legal Department at a cost of £350, which then needs to be registered with Land Registry for a further £40. This is in contrast to tenants who just need to get permission from the Area Housing Office, and planning permission when relevant. There is no fee for obtaining permission from the Area Housing Office.

Homes for Islington realise that this expense to leaseholders has resulted in a number of them not going through

the proper procedure, which means that they are in breach of their lease, and in some circumstances do not have the planning permission they require. Alternatively, other leaseholders that want to erect an aerial or satellite dish have found the additional fees prohibitive, and so have gone without. We feel that the difference in cost for leaseholders and tenants is unfair.

### **New policy**

Following consultation with the Islington Leaseholders' Forum and advice received from Islington Council's Legal Department, Homes for Islington have decided to adopt a policy of non-enforcement of the clause where permission is given. The alternative was to vary every single lease, but this would have been very costly and time consuming.

This means that the aerials policy that applies to tenants now also applies to leaseholders. The policy does have provisions for when aerials etc need to be removed for works to the exterior of a building.

The ban on "for sale" signs is not affected by the non-enforcement policy on aerials.



## For more information

If you want to put up an aerial or satellite dish you should contact your Area Housing Office and ask for an application form. If you have put up a dish without obtaining permission you should apply for retrospective permission. For further information contact the Estate Services Department at your local Area Housing Office.

**Holland Walk**  
85-88 Holland Walk, London,  
N19 3XS  
(Phone: 020 7527 7498)

**Lyon Street**  
1 Lyon Street,  
London, N1 1DQ  
(Phone: 020 7527 6861)

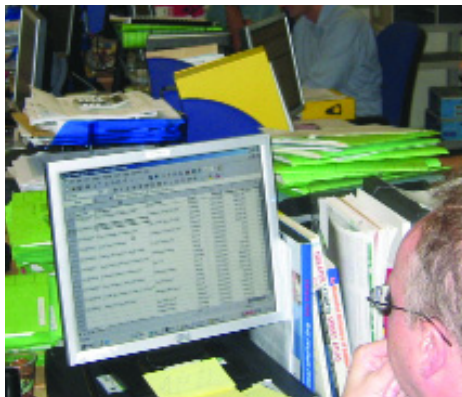
**Upper Street**  
257 Upper Street,  
London, N1 1RY  
(Phone: 020 7527 5376)

**Central Street**  
85 Central Street,  
London, EC1V 8DT  
(Phone: 020 7527 6232)

# We're moving to Isledon Road in May 07!

## Changes at Home Ownership Services

Over the last 18 months Home Ownership Services has restructured in order to improve the services we provide. Last year saw the arrival of a dedicated Customer Services Team. Since June 2006 there has been a specialised calculation team for the annual service charges in addition to the three teams that collect annual service charges and answer day-to-day enquiries. The calculation team will be able to provide more accurate and more detailed information for the annual service charges. See the article about changes to the way repairs information will be made available for an example of this.



For major works service charges, there are now separate consultation and collection teams. This has tied in with an improvement to the consultation process that we offer leaseholders. There are now public meetings before the scope of the major works has been decided. Additionally, over £800,000 more of major works bills were collected in the first 9 months of 2006/2007 than the same period in 2005/2006. For more details on our performance see the article on performance indicators.



### New offices

As a result of this expansion we need a new building to accommodate the increase in staff and due to the wider restructuring of the Homes for Islington Area Housing Offices, the office at Isledon Road is available. As well as being a larger building, Isledon Road has the advantage of having more interview rooms than our current office, which are also more accessible for visitors.

At the time of writing the exact date of the move has not been finalised, but we expect to move in the beginning of May 2007. If you wish to visit our offices or write to us, check where we are by using the contact details at the back of the newsletter. Details of how to get the offices are also on the back page. The telephone numbers and email addresses of staff will not change.

## Home Ownership Performance Indicators

Below are some performance indicators for Home Ownership Services for April to December 2006.

### Percentage of annual service charge target collected

The target for collection is 9% more than the total amount of estimated annual service charge for 2006/2007 to collect arrears from previous years. This means that for every £100 billed in the estimate we have to collect £109 to meet our target. At the end of the third quarter we were just ahead of target.

**Correspondence replied to within 10 working days**  
**The target for responding to correspondence within 10 working days is 100%.** In December, we managed 99.3%.

On average Home Ownership Services receives over 1500 pieces of correspondence per month.

### Right to Buy

The target time frame for admitting or denying Right to Buy applications is 4 weeks.

**For the first three quarters of 2006/2007, 90% of applications were processed in this time frame.**

This is an improvement from 86% in 2005/2006.

**For the first three quarters of 2006/2007, an average of 15 properties per month are being sold through the Right to Buy scheme.** For 2005/2006 the average was 32.

# Contact HFI's Home Ownership Services

By post – from May 07

50 Isledon Road

London N7 7LP

Phone: 020 7527 7715/7720

Email: [homeownership@homesforislington.org.uk](mailto:homeownership@homesforislington.org.uk)

Parking is available in the Sobell Leisure Centre, which you will have to pay for. Parking is available within 60 metres for Blue Badge holders.

## Transport

Nearest tube stations are Holloway Road (Piccadilly Line) and Finsbury Park (Piccadilly & Victoria Lines)

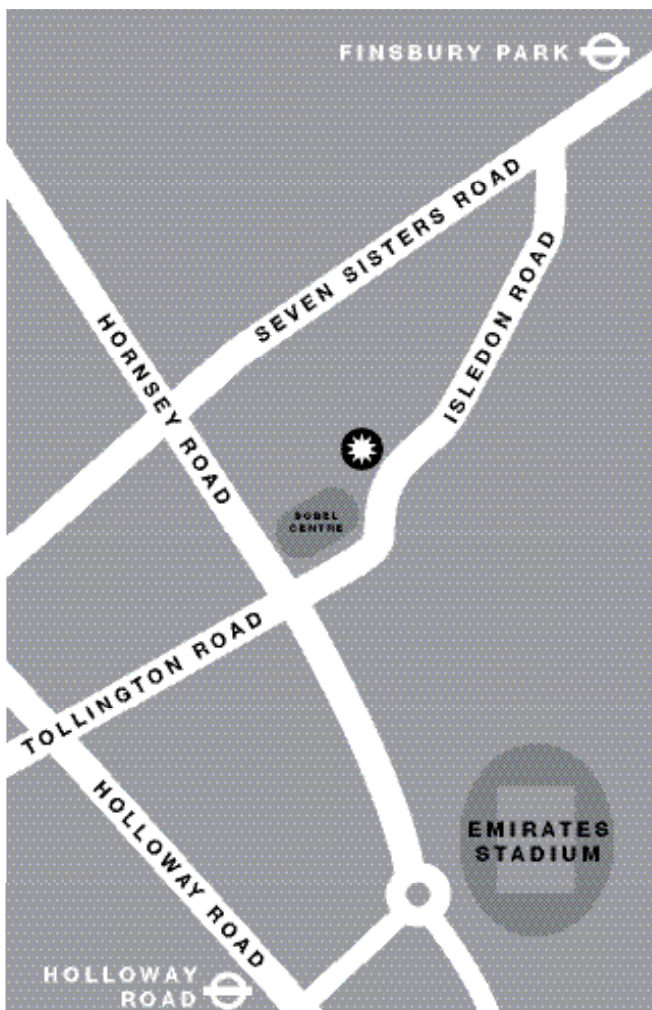
Bus routes:

17, 43, 153, 271, 393 (run along Holloway Road)

Bus routes: 4, 29, 153, 253, 254, 259,

279 (run along Isledon Road)

Bus route: 91 (runs along Hornsey Road)



## STOP PRESS!! – New Leaseholders' Association

Just as we were going to press, results on the ballot for the creation of a new Independent Leaseholders Association came in and you've overwhelmingly voted in favour. The result was 76.5% in favour and 23.5% against on a 22.4% turnout.

All Islington's leaseholders will be members of the new association with a membership fee of 40p per week being paid through the annual service charge. All leaseholders will therefore have the right to elect a committee every two years to run the association and to scrutinise its business.

In the interim, HFI will be working with the Islington Leaseholders Forum to help get this association up and running although this may take a number of months.

Ann Lucas, Chair of HFI's Board of Directors, said: "We welcome the vote by Islington's leaseholders to establish a new association. We look forward to building a positive and constructive working relationship with the new body so that we can improve our services to them and address their concerns. We are committed to building a strong relationship with leaseholders and as all Islington leaseholders will be members we hope to see lots of them involved and working with HFI and the Council."

Further details on elections to the new association will follow shortly.

## Suggestions for Islington Home Owner

We hope that you find this newsletter useful and interesting. If there are any issues that you would like more information on and you think would be of interest to other leaseholders, please let us know. For example, do you want to see articles about topics like major works or new legislation, or would you like to write an article yourself?

If you have any suggestions please write to Alex Evans at Home Ownership Services, or email them to [alex.evans@homesforislington.org.uk](mailto:alex.evans@homesforislington.org.uk)

