

Welcome to Homes for Islington News!



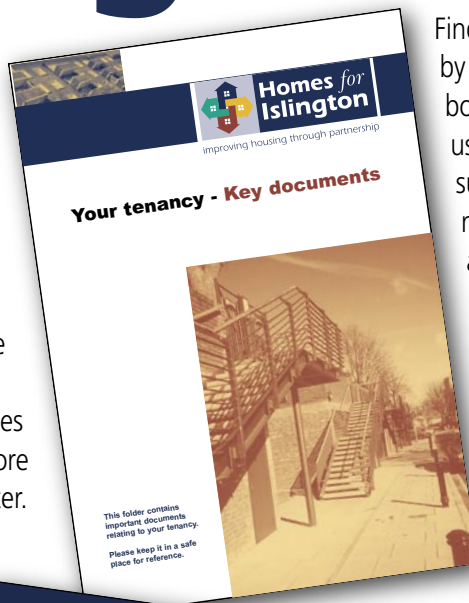
*Eamon McGoldrick,
Chief Executive of
Homes for Islington*

Homes for Islington (or "HFI" for short) started operations on 5th April and, without pausing for breath, began to put together the programme

for home improvements which will bring all council housing up to the Decent Homes Standard by 2010. You will be hearing more about this in future issues of this newsletter.

The new organisation brings with it many changes and many opportunities for improving housing and housing services in Islington. To keep you informed about these we have made it one of our early priorities to launch this newsletter, Homes for Islington News, which will be delivered to you four times a year. Your next issue will be out during mid October.

Every issue of Homes for Islington News will include news and information that relates to your tenancy, your home and the services provided for tenants and leaseholders by Homes for Islington. In this issue, for example, there is a useful summary that explains which housing services are now dealt with by Homes for Islington and which are still with Islington Council. This will help you know which organisation to approach for which services.



Find out also how you can get involved by attending Homes for Islington's public board meetings. These are examples of the useful information we will be including in subsequent issues. As in the previous tenant newsletters, there will also be information and news about your area.

In the future we will be looking at ways of getting feedback from you to ensure that Homes for Islington News continues to provide useful and relevant information and news for tenants and leaseholders.

In order to make the best use of money, we will frequently enclose other reading matter along with your newsletters.

With this issue, we have enclosed the new Key Documents folders containing tenant compact information and your new welcome packs. There is also information on our translation service. Whenever you see the translation symbol on a Homes for Islington document, it means that help is at hand for our service users who need to understand the message in their own language.

Hang on to your key documents!

Over time, you will be sent or will pick up additional key publications from Homes for Islington. You should keep these key documents in a safe place where you can easily find them, as they have important information relating to your home and housing services. Your new Key Documents folder is an ideal place to store these documents.

CHOICES - housing options

Choices, Islington Council's new housing options toolkit, is now available. It includes flow charts outlining the processes involved for the various schemes that we offer, tear out application forms, useful information about community centres, council offices, estate agents and lots more.



A 'jargon buster' is included to explain some of the terms we use. The Plain English Campaign has awarded the toolkit a Crystal Mark, so you should find the information clear and easy to follow.

Choices is available from your local area housing office, library, various other council offices or by telephoning the Housing Registration Team on 020 7527 4140 or 020 7527 4143.

BETTER HOUSING OUR COMMON PURPOSE

Most organisations formulate vision and mission statements. Where this is done thoughtfully and there is real commitment to the principles laid down in those statements, the organisation will better succeed at achieving its purpose.

Homes for Islington was set up to provide, through continual improvement, the best achievable standards of housing and housing services for Islington Council's tenants and leaseholders. This is expressed in our vision and mission statements. We believe these statements express the common purpose that we have with you and we have published them here as part of Homes for Islington's commitment to let them guide everything we do.

Homes for Islington's Vision: Quality Homes for the Residents of Islington

The Mission Statement of Homes for Islington: to continuously improve housing for local residents, through sound investment, the effective management of resources and the relevant involvement of staff, residents and community partners

Six themes underlie our vision and mission:

- Exemplary and sustainable homes – supported through sound investment, attention to quality and design for changing needs
- A place for people – safe, attractive neighbourhoods, where residents may have pride and confidence in where they live
- Accessibility and affordability – supporting residents' access to health, leisure, recreation, education and training
- Equality for all – where estates and neighbourhoods are tolerant of difference and where all forms of discrimination are abolished
- Doing it green – efficient use of natural resources, applying eco-friendly design, recycling waste and improved 'green' pace;
- Listening – consulting widely with our residents in the spirit of productive partnership



The Homes for Islington website is at www.homesforislington.org.uk. If you visit the site now, you will find it is still a single page with links to our pages on the Islington Council website. But all that is about to change!

In September the full website will go live and that will just be the start. Once the new site is up and operating smoothly, we will be looking for feedback from tenants and leaseholders to ensure that the site is responsive to your needs.

The website is being developed by a staff team called the Homes for Islington Web Group. The site outline that they have produced covers all the most relevant matters relating to your housing. Priority is being given to good website usability, including making it easy to find what you are looking for.

A website is a great way to keep information up-to-date and easy to access. For example, it will be a great place to keep you informed about works that may be carried out on your estate. It is also a wonderfully convenient way to access services and we plan to develop the site along these lines.

Results of the recent tenant survey show that a high proportion of tenants already have access to the Internet through computers they have at home or at work. All Islington Council libraries now have computers that the public can use free, so everyone who can get to a library can get Internet access. We expect that Internet access will continue to grow rapidly and the website could become the most popular way for tenants and leaseholders to contact Homes for Islington and tap into the information and services they require. The Homes for Islington Web Group will continue to monitor the growth of Internet access and we will keep you informed about website developments through this newsletter.

Where to find us. In the meantime, information about Homes for Islington can be found on the housing pages of the Islington Council website, which is at www.islington.gov.uk. Information about the housing services provided by the council, such as those provided by Housing Benefits and the Housing Aid Centre, is also on the housing pages.

HOMES FOR ISLINGTON OPENS ITS DOORS

Homes for Islington, the country's newest and largest arms length management organisation (ALMO) is now full swing and recently held its first public board meeting.

Homes for Islington was launched on April 5, following an overwhelming 'yes' vote by residents to establish an ALMO to manage council properties. Homes for Islington has a budget of more than £47m to spend on housing stock this year and is set to receive £156m from the government to improve council homes in Islington, pending a successful Best Value inspection later this year, which means at least a two-star rating - based on the quality of the service provided. These funds will mean vital home improvements, such as new kitchens and bathrooms and may include central heating, new windows and roofs, improved home security, damp proofing and insulation.

The board of directors that manages the organisation is made up of seven Islington tenants and leaseholders, five council representatives and five independent members. The board has the final say on how housing services for more than 39,000 properties are provided. With representation at the highest level of the organisation, residents now have a more direct say in managing their homes, shaping the services they receive and improving standards.

As Homes for Islington is such a large organisation, serving over 35,000 residents, the board of directors needs to ensure it is in touch with the views of residents. So, in addition to the board of directors, there are two sub boards, made up of board directors and resident representatives nominated from the local consultative panels and forums. The work of the sub boards includes forming links with area housing panels and other consultative groups, developing

the resident involvement strategy and recommending capital works programmes.

The Managed Property Sub Board membership comprises six directors and six resident representatives; the Contracted Services Sub Board consists of six directors and four resident representatives.

Residents are invited to attend public board meetings. A programme of public board meetings is listed in this newsletter. (See Welcome to Homes for Islington Public Board Meetings) Advance notification of monthly board meetings is also provided through local media and area housing offices and sent to area housing panels, the Leaseholder Forum, tenant management organisations and tenant management cooperatives. Sub board meetings will be open to the public later this year.



Homes for Islington Board Directors visit the Andover Estate. To see for themselves where improvements have been made and where there is need for more investment.

Welcome to HFI Public Board Meetings

Homes for Islington's board meetings are open to the public. Agenda and papers for this meeting are available 3 days in advance of the meeting through Homes for Islington's website **www.homesforislington.org.uk**

All meetings take place at **6.30pm** at **The Stephenson Hall** at the **NCH, 85 Highbury Park, London N5 1UD**

You are welcome to attend on the following dates: Monday 2nd August 2004, Monday 6th September 2004, Monday 4th October 2004, Monday 1st November 2004, Monday 6th December 2004, Monday 10th January 2005, Monday 7th February 2005, Monday 7th March 2005

For any enquiries please contact the **HFI Governance Team** on **020 7527 5148**

For any queries of if you require a **Sign Language Interpreter** please contact **Mary Switzer, Room 115, Highbury House, 5 Highbury Crescent, London N5 1RN**, telephone **020 7527 5148** or email, **Mary.switzer@islington.gov.uk**

HOMES FOR ISLINGTON OR COUNCIL - WHO PROVIDES THE SERVICE?

Now that Homes for Islington (HFI) has started you will need to contact us for many of the housing services that you previously received from the council. This article explains which services are still supplied by the council and which are now supplied by Homes for Islington. It also tells you which services you can access through your area housing office and Repairline.

You should still contact the council for the following services:

- Finding a home
- Services and information for landlords
- Tenant/landlord relations in private renting
- Housing strategy for Islington Council
- PFI2 (new stage of private finance initiative)
- Housing Benefits
- Empty homes
- Temporary housing
- Housing associations
- Council tax

Details can be found by going to the housing pages on the Islington Council website at www.islington.gov.uk

Contact Homes for Islington for:

- Adaptations (special arrangements in your home if you have a disability)
- Caretaking on your estate
- Elderly decorations scheme
- Estate parking
- Gas safety
- Grounds maintenance
- Leaseholder services

- Major works
- New River Green Project
- PFI monitoring
- Rent
- Repairs
- Right to Buy
- Service charges
- Transfers
- Translation (of Homes for Islington publications)
- Your tenancy

Your local area housing office is a good starting point for most housing services:

- Tenancy matters, including information on rent account and initial form for transfer requests and Housing List registration forms.
- Information about mutual exchange and the up to date list of properties on offer.
- The reporting and investigation of antisocial behaviour in and around HFI properties.
- Estate parking, including permits, letting of car spaces, cages and garages.
- Issue of new and replacement communal door key fobs.
- Repairs to communal areas of estates, but please note that repairs to your own residence should be reported to the Repairline (See below).
- Housing Benefit forms can be collected from, verified and returned to your area office. Forms are not assessed by Homes for Islington, but an officer from the council's Housing Benefits department is based in each area office and can supply urgent Housing Benefit advice.

Area offices do not deal with:

- Council tax.
- Assessment of Housing Benefit (though there is a council benefits officer in each area office).
- Street parking.
- Payment of rent – There are no longer cash offices at area housing offices, but you can ask there about alternative ways to pay. Information on ways to pay will also be sent to you with your new rent cards in the autumn.
- The issue of rent cards – This is dealt with by the Rent Accounts Section of Homes for Islington. Contact 020 7527 4092/4077/4048 or 4057
- Initial report of repairs to your own residence.

Repairs to your own residence

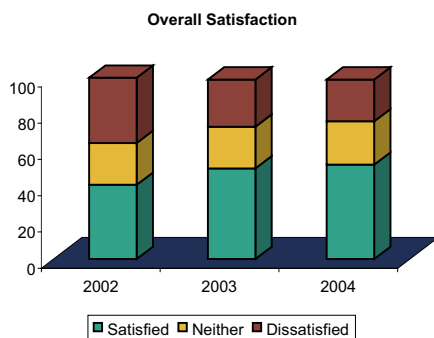
All repairs, other than for communal areas, should be reported to the Repairline on freephone 0800 694 3344. Both routine and emergency calls are dealt with from 8am to 8pm Mondays-Fridays and from 8am till noon on Saturdays. Emergency repairs only can be reported outside these hours. Please note that this freephone number is only for reporting repairs. If you have access to the Internet, you can report repairs online to the Islington website at www.islington.gov.uk. Go to the **Home** page and click the button for **Online repairs for council tenants**. Then follow the simple instructions. This service will be available from the Homes for Islington site when it goes live in the autumn.

HFI TENANTS SATISFACTION SURVEY 2004

Results from the latest tenant survey will be sent to you in the annual report for 2003/04. Results of the leaseholders survey will be published in the next issue of Islington Home Owner.

Homes for Islington thanks every tenant who took the time to complete the survey.

The more of you that send in your surveys, the better the information we have to improve services. Congratulations to the winners of the survey prize draw:



to the winners of the survey prize draw: *Mr T Smith (Holland Walk area), Ms B Batchelor (Partners),*

Ms J Sung (Central St area), Miss S Dennis (Isledon Rd area), Ms M Saromi (Isledon Rd area), Mr M Marucci and Mr D Cronin (both Upper St area).

If you would like more information about the survey, please send an email to performance.monitoring@islington.gov.uk or telephone **020 7527 4079**.

Boleyn Road Estate Services forge closer links with tenants and residents associations



In an effort to improve links with tenants and residents associations (TRA's), the Boleyn Road Estate Services Section has put in place a number of initiatives.

On a fortnightly basis, the caretaker manager will contact TRA chairs to ask if there are any concerns or comments in terms of the caretaking service. This should eventually lead to a more proactive approach and give an opportunity to address the concerns expressed by TRA's in a timely fashion.

The TRA's are also contacted by the caretaker manager to inform them when their caretaker is on leave and what the cover arrangements will be.

There is also a new system in place, which enables closer monitoring of the estate inspection programme and associated administrative procedures.

This should ensure that the TRA's receive invitations to the inspection with adequate notice and on completion of the inspection receive the reports within an agreed timescale.

Antisocial behaviour successes

The Boleyn Road antisocial behaviour team gained three ABC's (Acceptable Behaviour Contracts) in the month of May, on youths from the Highbury Estate.

The antisocial behaviour surgeries continue to be held on the first Tuesday of every month. In an effort to increase attendance, the surgeries are to be held in various venues such as community halls within the estates.

For more information contact the Boleyn Road area office.

Problems can lead to solutions

Following a report from a Highbury Grove tenant about water penetration into the bathroom from a neighbouring property, a surveyor was sent to investigate. There were a number of delays due to difficulty in gaining access to the relevant property, which were only overcome by taking legal action. Once the source of the leak had been identified, it was necessary to let the bathroom dry out before a replacement could be fitted.

It was at this point that the tenant, who has some mobility issues, identified a need for a walk-in shower. An occupational therapist's assessment was quickly undertaken and consequent plans were drawn up for the most suitable shower room.

An agreement around funding for the shower was struck between Homes for Islington and the Occupational Health Section, which allowed the shower to be fitted without delay. What began as a complaint around water penetration ended with the fitting of a superior walk-in shower at a cost of approximately £5,500!

Boleyn Road

BEWARE BOGUS HOME CALLERS!

Recently an elderly resident of Burder Close Estate was conned into opening her door to a man pretending to be a Thames Water operative carrying out a test on the water supply. On entry this man proceeded to ransack the property and stole some cash.

Anyone approaching your property from a recognised company/organisation will have to produce a photo ID

card. Anyone who calls at your home should be more than willing when asked to provide their ID along with details of their head office or depot. You should be able to check with the caller's head office and verify the identity of the caller before letting them into your home. Any reluctance on the caller's part should raise your suspicions and they should not be allowed to enter your home.

CARETAKING CONCERNS

Interview with Dave Evans Boleyn Road Area Office Caretaker manager

Q) When did you start working for Homes for Islington?

A) April 1979. I have been a caretaker for nine years.

Q) What position did you start in?

A) I started as a resident caretaker.

Q) Have you always worked in caretaking?

A) Yes, I have, 25 years is a long time, and I have seen many changes in that time.

Q) What would you say are the most pleasing aspects of caretaking?

A) Meeting people and receiving calls when caretakers have done a good job. We rightly receive complaints about the caretaking service when things go wrong, but when a resident calls to say thank you, it does make you feel good and that your efforts are appreciated.

Q) How do you deal with frustration within your post?

A) Drink plenty of black coffee and try to be proactive in resolving issues. Many things about the job can lead to frustration. For me it is the dumping of lumber by a very small minority of residents which spoils the quality of life for the majority.

Q) How serious is the role of caretaking now compared to when you started?

A) The role has developed immensely from when I started. I can remember being given a 6p cotton mop, a galvanised bucket, broom, pine disinfectant and gloves and told "That's your area of work get on with the job." Today the caretakers are take



Dave Evans, Boleyn Road Area Office Caretaker Manager

courses in BICS (British Institute of Learning and Science), which is a nationally recognised certificate in caretaking. There has also been an improvement in the cleaning materials and equipment that are used to assist the caretakers. For example we have a range of cleaning materials, high pressure steam cleaners and lumber carts to clear lumber. It helps to have the right tools for the job.

Q) What initiative within the caretaking past would you like to see reintroduced today?

A) Personally, I would like to see an evening patrol brought back, whether by caretakers or estate wardens. Caretaking, with repairs, are the services which have the most impact on residents. The caretaking service has gone through many changes over the past few years and I believe that residents are now seeing an improved service.

Q) What words of wisdom could you offer to tenants who have a caretaking service?

A) The estate is your home. Residents and caretakers need to work in partnership in order to keep the estate clean and tidy.



Interview with Stan Goulding Estate Services Officer

Q) How long have you worked for Islington Council and Homes For Islington?

A) I started with the council 18 years ago - ESO (Estate Services Officer) since inception Sept 2000.

Q) What changes have you seen within estate services over the last couple of years?

A) The council has seen the scope of the service increase due to the setting up of the ALMO. The importance of the ESO teams around the neighbourhoods is finally being recognised. They can deliver instant satisfaction to TRA's (tenant and resident associations) in some aspects of repair reporting and monitoring.

Q) What aspect of estate services do you enjoy?

A) Working in conjunction with TRA's and the Project and Development Team in identifying areas of improvement on our estates is very rewarding. Playing a part in creating a space for something like a children's play area or garden area which benefits the local community and benefits to those that use it makes the job worthwhile.

Q) Now that we have changed over to become Homes for Islington what positive initiatives are being taken to develop estate services?

A) The Facelift Project is one example that has shown us that if funding is available the ESO teams can deliver larger schemes that fulfil residents' wishes. The needs of the estates around the borough are recorded each year during their quarterly estate inspections and the reality is that not all of the improvements required on estates can be rectified out of our day-to-day repair budgets.

Q) Does frustration enter your line of work and, if so, what type?

A) Repeated acts of vandalism to communal areas, especially after a repair has been completed, the

cost of which limits the amount of repairs that can be carried out. When something like the communal door to a block has been vandalised to the point of actually having to replace it, that cost to replace the door has now been taken away from something else the estate or block needs.

Q) Finally what would you like to say to tenants who use the estate services?

A) I would like tenants to report other residents who cause damage to communal areas or allow their visitors to do so. This would aid our efforts in dealing with the culprits. The negative actions of the few spoil the enjoyment for the many. And the reward, when living on an estate for the many, is living in a clean, peaceful and respectable environment, which we all have a right to. As service providers it is sometimes difficult to provide to our optimum, but with the help of the tenants on the estate, we can work towards achieving maximum service.

CARETAKER UPDATE

TRA reps nominated by FITA have been meeting with officers and GMB officials in a Caretaker Service Improvement Group to look at how to maintain continued improvement in the caretaking service. The second meeting, which took place at Holland Walk on the 28th April 2004, generated lively discussion.

It was agreed that service level agreements would be drawn up for an estate in the Holland Walk area and for another in the Boleyn Road area. The TRA, caretaker, GMB and officers would agree what sort of service would be provided within the hours of caretaking allocated to each estate. Whilst this will not mean an increase or reduction in the total hours worked, it will allow the TRA to identify those tasks they wanted carried out in an order of priority, along with a decision as to how frequently this should happen. This might, for example, include the lifts or entrances to the block being cleaned first thing in the morning and last thing in the afternoon at the expense of something else. It will be residents who decide what service they want within the service time available.

The agreements will operate as pilots for three months before any decision is made to extend this arrangement to other areas. Residents will be kept informed of changes in any current service provision and will be able to comment on success or otherwise and whether the service provided continued to meet their needs and priorities.

Watch this space for further updates.

Boleyn Road

Housing Benefit Access



To deal with housing benefit issues we now have a housing benefit drop in and appointment service available at Boleyn Road Area office. The drop in service operates daily from 2pm - 4:30pm Monday to Friday and no appointment is needed. If the query takes more than 15 minutes then an appointment will be made. The appointment system is for housing benefit cases that are either complicated or require a more detailed investigation and can be made by the housing benefit officer or assistant at the reception desk. For telephone enquiries please phone 020 7527 4990.

ESTATE IMPROVEMENTS

At present there are four floodlights due to go up on the Kerridge Court Estate. Two floodlights for the new children's play area and two floodlights in front of the football pitch area to brighten up the football pitch and immediate area surrounding the pitch.

The new children's play area on the Burder Close Estate has recently been completed. The next phase will be to erect a mural painted by children from Burder Close and Kerridge court. This has been delayed until the boundary wall separating the railway line from the estate has had some safety works carried out. Large fencing and a stabilising wall are being erected for safety precautions. For more information contact Stan Goulding, the estate services officer on 020 7527 8319 or Daisy Froud at Groundwork on 020 7239 1286.

ASB Hotline and Surgery

Boleyn Road antisocial behaviour message line and monthly surgeries are encouraging more tenants to be proactive in reporting problems in their neighbourhood. The monthly antisocial behaviour surgery will now be taking place at several community centres throughout the Mildmay and Highbury East wards as well as the area housing office, always on the first Tuesday of the month.

The next surgery will take place at the Chestnuts



Community Centre, Highbury Grange, London N5 on Tuesday the 6th July from 3pm - 7pm. For further details, please contact the antisocial behaviour officers at Boleyn Road Area Housing Office on 020 7527 2905/8321. To report any antisocial behaviour, please telephone the 24-hour message line on 020 7527 8346 or email us on boleynrd@islington.gov.uk. Your information will be treated in the strictest confidence and is vital to us.

Housing Officers New Appointment System

Each Housing officer now operates an appointment system, being available one afternoon per week from 2pm - 4pm and one morning per week from 9:30am - 11:30am. (These times are not on the same day.) The purpose of this arrangement is to allow housing officers to focus on seeing tenants and assisting with any issues.

You can book your appointment through the housing officer, housing assistant or at the reception desk. When making your appointment, it is important to state clearly the reason you need to see the housing officer as some queries can better be dealt with by someone other than the housing officer or it might be helped by a housing assistant or customer services assistant, who may be able to help you straight away.