

# Welcome to Homes for Islington News!



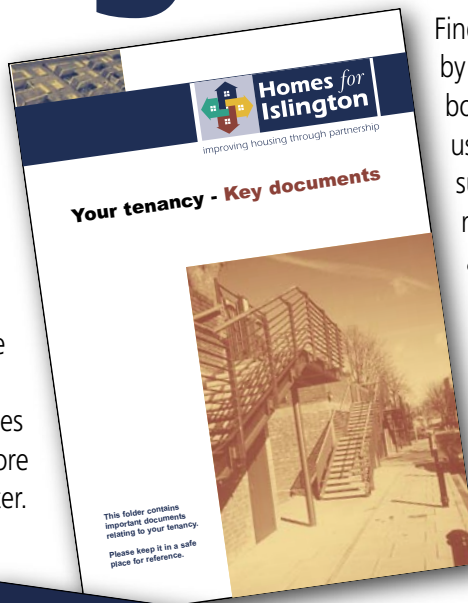
*Eamon McGoldrick,  
Chief Executive of  
Homes for Islington*

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](http://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](http://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](http://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

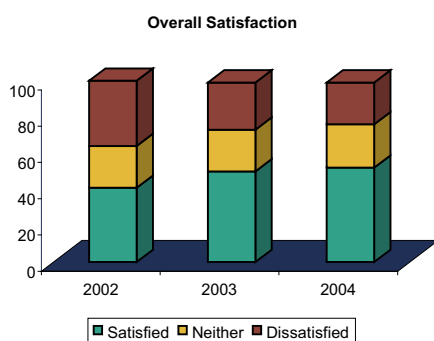
All repairs, other than for communal areas, should be reported to the Repairline on freephone 0800 694 3344. Both routine and emergency calls are dealt with from 8am to 8pm Mondays-Fridays and from 8am till noon on Saturdays. Emergency repairs only can be reported outside these hours. Please note that 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](http://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:



we have to improve services. Congratulations 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](mailto:performance.monitoring@islington.gov.uk) or telephone **020 7527 4079**.

## Move to ALMO

The long awaited move to arms length management status has now been achieved. Elsewhere in this newsletter you will have read fuller explanations of what this means. At first you will notice few changes except the change in logo but we are looking forward to the chance to find a wider range of creative solutions to the problems of delivering a first rate service on a low budget. The chance to be able to carry out much needed improvements to the properties in our care is one which we are eagerly anticipating and the additional grants available when we achieve two star status will be very welcome.

## Partnership arrangements

Homes for Islington intend to increase the say residents have over the way in which their estates are run and what improvements are made. We seek to involve the residents through their representative Associations in a wide variety of decisions.



## Caretaking agreements

*The caretaking service is one of our highest profile estate services. The charge made for providing this service has recently been shown separately on rent cards and residents are able to judge the value they get for money.*

*Upper Street has pioneered the idea of negotiating with tenants and residents associations over the allocation of caretaker's duties.*

## GROUNDWORK CAMDEN AND ISLINGTON BENTHAM

The residents of this Essex Road Estate have been suffering high levels of antisocial behaviour. Conventional solutions have failed to bring any significant improvements and Homes for Islington have decided upon a more radical approach. Groundwork Islington and Camden have been commissioned to consult with residents and draw up an overall plan including landscape improvements, security improvements, and diversionary youth activity. Consultation is well advanced and costed plans will soon be available. Homes for Islington and Groundworks will then be able to work with the residents identifying the necessary money and prioritising the works.



## CIRCLE 33

On the Bentham Estate a proportion of the housing is managed by Circle 33 Housing Association. Upper Street Area Office and Circle 33 have been concerned at duplication of some services and different levels of services and charges. Circle 33 and HFI now hold regular meetings to agree standard service delivery and co-operation in delivering the most efficient service possible for the budget available. Ideas like Circle buying in caretaking services.

*The agreements are designed to be as flexible as possible and to take into account changing circumstances and seasonal variation. On some blocks residents have volunteered to care for their own access stairs, freeing up more of the caretakers time for litter picking and grounds maintenance. On other estate residents feel that stairs, lifts and communal entrance take the highest priority.*

*Different estates have different problems and priorities and by giving residents a voice in how the job is to be prioritised we hope to increase customer satisfaction and make the service more responsive to local need.*

# Upper Street

## GROUNDWORK CAMDEN AND ISLINGTON CUMMING

At a meeting of the Area Housing Panel we introduced representatives of the Groundwork Camden and Islington organisation and invited Tenants and Residents Associations to consider using their services to help improvement plans for their estates.

The Cumming Tenants and Residents Association were the first to avail themselves of the invitation and the consultation process is now well underway.

It is anticipated that an outline plan of the improvements to the physical environment and service delivery to the estates requested by residents will soon be available. Homes for Islington and Groundwork can then begin work in conjunction with the TRA to raise money and plan the works.

## Packington



Packington residents have elected their Independent Tenant and leasehold advisors to assist them in the exercise of selecting the preferred option for the future of their estate. Tenants have selected Tony Bird of TPAS and the Leaseholders have appointed Roy Clark of Gottfried Clark Associates. Residents have begun to examine the options and the target date for a decision has been set for 29.07.04.

The gas safety consultants have prepared a report on the council's mid term strategy for ensuring continued safety across the estate, which will involve removing gas from all the dwellings.

Finally the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has accepted the council's proposal to raise private finance for the Packington Square project.

### Action against antisocial behaviour

Staff at Packington estate have been actively combating antisocial behaviour by appointing a dedicated housing officer, Sally Thorne to deal with complaints of this nature. So far we have evicted one family who have disrupted life on the estate for the past 10 years, following a protracted legal battle, and are awaiting the court's final decision on the future of another anti social family. Three further cases are being progressed through litigation.

### Estate securities budget

Representatives of the residents and tenants associations, (meeting as the Area Housing Panel) were asked to continue annual grants of £12,000 to the Sebbon Street Youth Outreach work and £19,100 to the Rosebowl Youth group from this budget. Both organisations do important work in redirecting the energies of local youth from anti social and nuisance behaviour. The panel heard reports from the groups about their aims and activities. Members voted unanimously to continue the grants.

### Marquess/New River Green

The overall project is expected to complete at the end of the year. Work on the final two refurbishment phases is in progress. There are still a number of small areas to landscape and the creation of a park in the centre of the Channel Island blocks.

All the new developments will be completed by spring next year. Most of these dwellings have and will be occupied by applicants nominated by the council.

All the new estate roads are complete and open to the public. The final surface for these roads will be laid over the next few months. The roads will then be adopted that means they will become public highways. They will be cleaned and maintained by the council's highways and conservation department.

Once the roads have been adopted a controlled parking zone will be introduced. Residents were consulted on the controlled parking zone in February 2003. For more information you can telephone the Traffic and Transportation enquiries number 0207 527 8006 or 2642.

*Until the roads are adopted they are still managed by Northway House. Enquiries should be directed to Kevin Voase on 020 7527 5372*

## SOUTHERN HOUSING

As part of the New River Green project a number of units have been built and are managed by Southern Housing. There have been some problems between residents of the different housing and differences between the level of services delivered. Homes for Islington and Southern Housing now hold regular meetings to investigate solutions to these problems.

## Programmed upkeep of estate fabric

A further £3/4m will be spent on the regular replacement of outworn building components and cyclical repairs and external redecoration. This year the work will be concentrated on the New North Road area including Halton Mansions, Hawes Street, Sebbon Street, Hedingham Close, Popham Road, Baring Court and Haslam Close.

# Community Halls

Day to day management of the Estate Community Halls has now passed to the Area Housing Office. We are looking to support the community work being carried out from these halls and to encourage their use for the benefit of local communities. Each community hall is run by a management committee of volunteers who makes their own bookings, a list of contacts is available from Chris Donovan at the Upper Street Area Office on 020 7527 5379.

### Almorah

The Almorah Road Community Centre hosts Tenants and Residents Association functions, local community events and a variety of special interest groups including a church, stamp collecting, keep fit, the Canonbury Association an over 50's group and a childminders group and provides a venue for youth work and coffee break.

### Sebbon St

Outreach youth work, elderly persons social clubs and regular community events are a feature of this well used facility. The Sebbon St Xchange manages the hall in the interests of their local community and employ a worker to maximise its use and plan for future development.

### Bentham

A daily community nursery occupies the ground floor of this hall and the Tenants and Residents use the upper floor, renting it out for community events and celebrations. The very active committee is heavily involved in plans for developing the estate future and the hall will form a vital part of these plans.

### Liz McKeon

A community flat which hosts the Islington Pensioners Forum.

### Mersey

A small community flat, which serves the needs of the active tenants and residents association.

### Packington

A modern hall on the Packington estate which has been well used by local community groups the Packington Community Hall has provided the venue for a number of mass meetings to discuss the future of the estate.

### Popham

A small community hall on the Popham Road used for community and TRA events. This facility has been run by volunteers from the Popham Estate TRA. With help from the neighbouring Cumming estate there are plans being developed to increase it's facilities and usage.

### Walter Sickert

A large hall on one level which provides a range of community services. One part of the building is used as a community nursery and the main auditorium hosts church activities, community events, Tenants and residents association meetings, and a diverse range of activities including dance, slimming groups a children's cheerleading group and an older residents luncheon club.

## Antisocial behaviour

A specialist antisocial behaviour officer was appointed last year to increase the time which could be spent on attempting to resolve difficult problems between neighbours and to thoroughly prepare cases which are taken to court. This increasingly complex area of work requires a great deal of time and careful preparation to ensure that cases which are taken to court are properly presented.

Additional powers in the new legislation are being carefully examined to see how they can best be applied in the area to protect the quality of life of the well-behaved majority of our residents from the few louts.

## Antisocial behaviour hotline

We rely heavily on information from residents to assist us in monitoring problems and identifying perpetrators. Ideally concerned residents should contact their housing officer or the antisocial behaviour officer but we recognise that not everyone feels able to be identified and a confidential hotline has been established in the office. Messages may be left on this line in confidence. The line is checked daily for information.

Upper Street Antisocial Behaviour Hotline **020 7527 5346**

# Upper Street

## Residents Compact improvement projects

The Upper Street Area Housing Panel consists of representatives of the residents and tenants associations in the area. Among many other tasks, this panel allocates the money available to the office for improvements on our estates. At their meeting in March they agreed the projects to be funded for the year 2004/5. Included in the lists are:

- An improved play area for the Cumming Estate and at Parker Court
- Mirrors in the lifts on the Cumming Estate.
- Tree works to a variety of areas.
- Security works on the Colinsdale, on the Mersey Estate, at Jersey House and at Heddingham Close.
- Estate Lighting improvements on the Mersey Estate, at Barret House, at Parker Court and at Swan House.
- Improved drainage works at Ashby House and Parker Court.

- A variety of fencing and anti motorcycle barriers.
- Fees for Groundwork consultation with residents about the long term improvement plans on Bentham Estate.
- Adaptations to bin chambers to remove 'blind corners' and improve security on Eric Fletcher, Ashby Houses and at Morgan Mansions and Richmond Grove.

These works are estimated at around £165,000

If you have ideas about improvements for your estate you should speak to your tenants and residents association. If you do not have a TRA please contact Chris Donovan at the Upper Street Office who will pass on your ideas to the member of the panel who looks after the interests of otherwise unrepresented blocks.

## CCTV

Closed circuit television is a powerful weapon in Homes for Islington's fight against antisocial behaviour on our estates. Although such systems can be very effective they are expensive to install and run. The Upper Street Area Housing Office is currently carrying out trials on a selection of different systems to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and cost effectiveness.

### Concealed CCTV

We are also testing hidden cameras in a variety of locations; although notices will declare that an area may be under surveillance the location of the cameras will be less obvious. These systems are more portable than those mentioned above and are designed to be used in smaller locations for more limited periods, moved around more often.

### Relocatable CCTV

The relocatable systems currently in place on the Channel Islands and the Canonbury Road/Ashby Grove area are continuously monitored and are providing information about nuisance in this area. Our partnership arrangements with the Police have enabled us to identify several of the ringleaders in anti social behaviour in this area and action is being taken against them and their families.

One of the problems with taking action against the type of casual

street nuisance suffered by the residents of these areas, is that once it is known that we are able to take effective action against perpetrators of nuisance in one area, the problem simply moves on to an adjacent one.

The systems are designed to be able to move with the problem and can be relocated should problems cease. Should the problems return, so can the cameras.

The costs involved in relocating this type of system are relatively high as are the running costs.

## Customer care

We now regularly achieve our target of answering all correspondence within ten working days. Monitoring of calls confirms that, in almost all cases, they are answered within six rings. The use of answer phones is restricted and carefully monitored.

A reported problem with telephone messages being passed on to members of staff who are out of the office has been tackled and an electronic system designed to monitor the way in which they are passed on and responded to has been put into place.

Caretaking standards are subject to regular scrutiny from the outside the office. Upper Street does well in these appraisals, regularly achieving first or second place amongst the area offices.

## Arrears

The arrears of rent for the Upper Street Area continue to fall regularly in advance of the target. Last year we achieved an overall reduction of 24% against a target of 20%. For this year we have been set a target of 15% and have started well, exceeding the target every week to the date of writing.

## Lumber project

Dumped lumber and fly tipped rubbish is an increasing problem on our estates. Caretaker's lumber stores, where they exist, were designed to store the rubbish from a less consumerist age and can no longer cope with the sheer volume of items disposed of by residents. A project is being developed by Upper Street estate services team to build a large central depot and employ vans to collect lumber reported by our caretakers within one working day. Items which can be recycled will be donated to a workshop training unemployed youths in renovation skill and then sold to people in need at low prices. The remainder will be sorted for recycling and disposal.