

Welcome to Homes for Islington News!



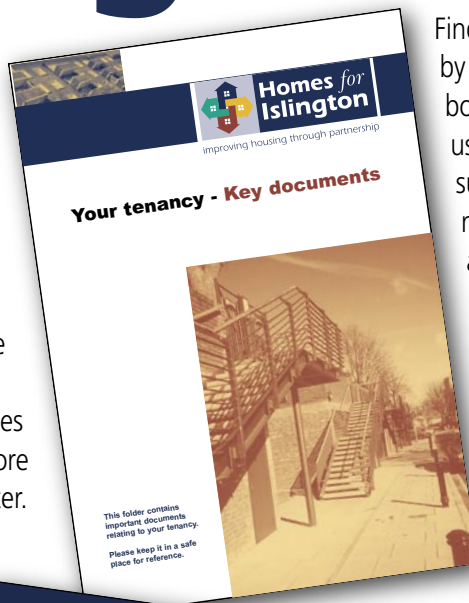
*Eamon McGoldrick,
Chief Executive of
Homes for Islington*

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

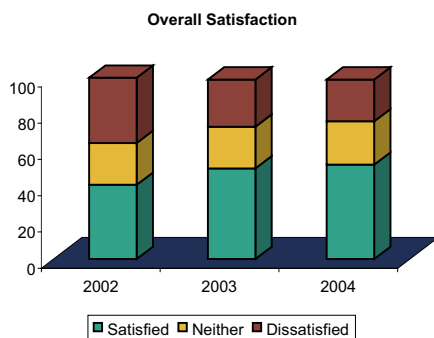
All repairs, other than for communal areas, should be reported to the Repairline on freephone 0800 694 3344. Both routine and emergency calls are dealt with from 8am to 8pm Mondays-Fridays and from 8am till noon on Saturdays. Emergency repairs only can be reported outside these hours. Please note that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



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**.

Estate agreements out now



Keep an eye out for your new estate agreement. Packed with information about your block or estate, they contain important contact numbers, information on any works that are taking place over the year and details of the services to your estate, such as caretaking and refuse collection.

The Housing Support Service - giving you that extra support when you need it

At Homes for Islington we know that people sometimes experience difficulties with managing their tenancy. This can be for a variety of reasons such as health, physical disability, age or dependency problems. The Housing Support Service provides short-term support for tenants who may need more time and personal attention than a housing officer is normally able to offer.

Helen Maltby, our Housing Support Officer, can help with getting access to the correct benefits and with budgeting your finances. Through an assessment of support needs, agreeing actions and targets and producing a support plan, Helen can help tenants to cope with their tenancy and to live independently.

Referrals to housing support must come from your housing officer. If you are experiencing problems with your tenancy and would like to be considered for this service, call the office on 020 7527 6250. Where our Housing Support Officer is able to offer you assistance we will write to you and arrange an appointment to see you within five working days.

Central Street's antisocial behaviour message line is launched

Antisocial behaviour can be extremely distressing for our residents, be it harassment by neighbours, verbal abuse or youths driving mopeds across estates. Homes for Islington continues its commitment to tackling this issue and the Central Street Housing Office has now launched a 24-hour message line for residents to report incidents of anti-social behaviour in the area.

When calling please give us much information as possible such as the time, location, names or nicknames of the perpetrators if known. Descriptions of what they look like or what they were wearing will also help. You can remain anonymous if you like, but if you want to talk to someone, leave your name and number in confidence and you will be called back by the end of the next working day.

The information you give will be used in conjunction with the police to challenge the perpetrators of this behaviour, manage resources and target hot spots in the area.

Central Street Antisocial Behaviour Message Line
Call us on **020 7527 6247**

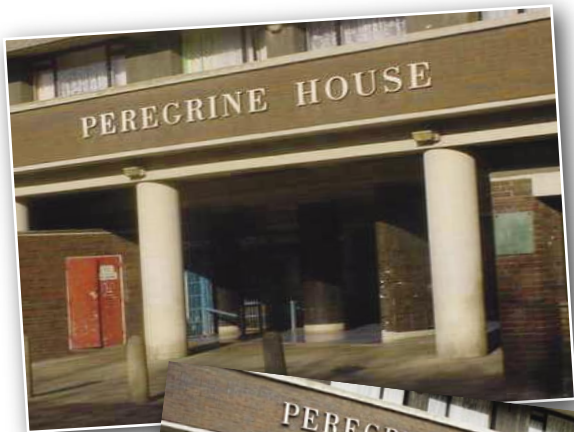


Central Street

BUNHILL BLOCKS BENEFIT FROM STATE OF THE ART SECURITY

Residents of Peregrine House can sleep easy following the installation of a state of the art concierge security system.

Over 200 homes in Peregrine House have benefited since the start of April from 32 strategically placed cameras in the lifts, lobby, roof access areas, entrances, garages and outside perimeter. The newly built concierge office, manned 16 hours a day, monitors the cameras and digitally records the images, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



In addition, fob-activated security doors have been installed and individual intercom systems fitted in each property, so that now only residents and guests can gain access to the block, giving peace of mind and security to all who live there.

Maureen Stroud, Jean Trotter, Jenny Robinson and Georgina Spencer of the Peregrine House TRA at the Concierge Office.



Jenny Robinson, Chair of the Peregrine House Tenants and Residents Association (TRA), told us "It's so much cleaner and safer. The cameras have made such a difference, particularly in the lifts. Many of the problems we have had here have stopped."

Concierge Officers on duty, from left to right, Alex Mensah, Petrit Lawrence and Azzeddine Guendouz.



Close by, at Kestrel House, a similar system has been installed, providing security and CCTV to over 100 homes in the block. The CCTV footage recorded at both blocks can be used as evidence in a court of law or as enforcement for antisocial behaviour orders, helping to tackle antisocial behaviour and reduce crime in the area.

If you would like more information on the concierge security systems, please call the Project Team on 020 7527 6222.

Nuisance neighbours take heed!

Once more the Clerkenwell County Court Bailiffs have visited the Central Street area to evict a nuisance tenant from their home. The eviction last month was the third such eviction to take place in the past nine months of tenants who have caused extreme nuisance to their neighbours in the Central Street Area. In each case acts of antisocial behaviour such as causing loud noise and playing loud music, offensive drunkenness, using or threatening to use violence, racist or homophobic behaviour, gestures and language, persistent arguing and door slamming have led to our tenants losing their homes.

Homes for Islington working in close cooperation with the Police Service, Islington's Legal Services and, most importantly, our residents, whose quality of life were greatly affected by their rowdy neighbours, have successfully brought before the County Court evidence of the nuisance caused and obtained eviction notices against the culprits. Residents from the Margery Street Estate, Sherston Court and Chadwell Street can again enjoy a more peaceful quality of life, now that their noisy neighbours have been evicted.

This action continues the process of tackling antisocial behaviour in the Central Street area that has been successful over the past few years. More nuisance neighbours from the Weston Rise Estate, Charles Rowan House and, again, Margery Street Estate have all been given their marching orders. This action, along with the repossession of properties from tenants on the Finsbury Estate, Kestrel House and St Philip House, where extreme nuisance was caused to neighbours by visitors to our tenants homes, are

all part of the work undertaken to tackle antisocial behaviour in the area. There is a close liaison between the police and staff at the Central Street Area Office who seek to act on information and evidence they receive from various sources. Home for Islington have also used professional witnesses to carry out surveillance on a number of its estates to gather evidence of nuisance, particularly where youths are concerned. Using the information obtained the police have conducted raids on various properties in the area in relation to issues of drugs and in particular on the Finsbury Estate, the Playdell Estate, Kestrel House, The Triangle and Cyrus House.



Acts of nuisance and antisocial behaviour can lead to eviction!

Most recently, they conducted early morning visits to a number of addresses on the Peregrine House Estate and found a large quantity of material at these addresses that is now the subject of further police investigation and action by Homes for Islington.

The Central Street Area Office is committed to taking action to tackle nuisance neighbours and will work with the police, other agencies and our residents to resolve issues of neighbour nuisance. Appropriate measures may be a simple letter or meeting to resolve the problem or the use of our Mediation Service. It could be that we enter into an agreement such as an Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC) with our tenant or their child where the matter relates to youth nuisance. In more serious cases it will be the use of Court Injunctions, antisocial behaviour orders (ASBO's), demoted tenancies or eviction that will be used to stop a nuisance neighbour.

What's your new way to pay?

The cash office at Central Street is now closed. Being very expensive to run, the savings made from the closure will be reinvested back into the service to provide improvements for all our tenants and leaseholders.

Last but not least!
Area Housing Manager
John Eustace serves our
last cash office customer
Councillor Joe Trotter



You still need to pay your rent and charges on time, so if you haven't already picked a new and convenient way to pay, here is a summary to help you:

By Standing Order or Direct Debit:

The simplest way to pay – drop into the housing office to pick up a form or call 020 7527 6250.

By phone:

Rent and Service Charges - call Islington Repair Line on 0800 694 3344 weekdays from 8am to 8pm and Saturday from 8am to 12 noon to pay by debit or credit card. Rent and Council Tax - call the automated telephone line 24 hours a day on 020 7527 8000 to pay by debit or credit card. Council Tax – call 020 7527 2633 weekdays from 8.30am to 6pm to pay by debit or credit card

At the post office:

Rent, Service Charges, Insurance, Council Tax – there are 4 post offices in the area where you can pay. To find your nearest one, get a list from the housing office reception or call 020 7527 6250. Cash and cheques only are accepted and you will need your payment card or payment slips to pay.

At PayPoints:

Rent – There are 40 PayPoints in the area where you can pay. Get a list from the housing office or call 020 7527 6250 to find your nearest one. You will need your payment card and cash only is accepted.

At the Municipal Offices, 222 Upper Street:

All Council Payments – you can pay by cash, cheque, credit card (not rent) and debit card on weekdays from 8.30am to 6pm and the last Saturday of the month from 9am – 1pm.

Central Street

Islington Consumers GET SWITCHED ON



Local consumers will now be able to take advantage of a new Fuel Supplier Hotline, "Get Switched On", which is the first project launched by the Islington Consumer Support Network.

The Network brings together a number of advice agencies including the council's Trading Standards Service, Islington Law Centre, Islington's Citizen Advice Bureau and Age Concern in a scheme designed to ensure consumers in Islington know who to turn to for help with consumer problems and disputes.

Research carried out by the network identified gas & electricity mis-selling as the top area of local consumer concern. Residents are also missing out on savings that can be made in switching gas and electricity supplier.

The "Get Switched On" campaign can give advice & support to residents about:

- How to make savings by switching supplier.

- Gas and electricity companies using hard sell tactics to persuade people to switch supplier.
- Taking up complaints.

The campaign is run in partnership with Islington Energy Centre, **energywatch** (the national consumer watchdog for gas and electricity customers) and Islington Language Service.

For free and independent advice, call the campaign hotline on **020 7527 2283**, email **energy.advice@islington.gov.uk**, or drop into the Islington Energy Centre, 159 Upper Street, London N1 1RE Monday-Friday 9am-5pm. Leaflets about the campaign are also available in other languages.

For more information about Islington Consumer Network contact Fiona Exley on 020 7527 3182 or email csn@islington.gov.uk.

Squirrels - Cute or Costly?

Squirrels are mainly woodland creatures but are also found large numbers in urban environments. With two breeding seasons a year, squirrels can be a delight for children playing in parks and gardens, but a pest for our tenants and leaseholders.

Squirrels have the ability to climb up walls and jump from trees onto balconies and roofs, affecting both houses and blocks. Once inside domestic buildings they can cause considerable damage such as gnawing through timber, insulation, even electrical wiring, which can cause electrical fires. As with all pests, the problem is made worse when a ready supply of food is available. To combat pests in your block:



- Dispose of domestic waste properly – wrap it up and place in the correct bin or chute
- Never leave refuse bags in estate corridors, landings or gangways
- Do not leave food out in your kitchens or on your balconies.
- Check for any obvious access points such as holes around pipes or window frames

Islington Council's pest control team does not offer a service for the control of squirrels. However, if you would like more information about squirrels or any pest, please contact the team on 020 7527 3190 or email pest.control@islington.gov.uk.