

## The results are in: how you scored our services

Shortly before Christmas we got the results of the survey of your views on our services. You can read how we plan to build on the positive and address your concerns on pages four and five

We published the survey's stand-out findings in your 2024 annual report. Your overall rating was 73%, with the three highest scores for our staff being easy to deal with, speed of last repair and cleaning in shared areas all at 79%. Complaints handling trailed behind all our ratings at 48%.

### The finer detail

On page four you will find the other main results and our plans to address small and larger causes of dissatisfaction. One useful aspect of the survey was it allowed you to not just grade us but also say what influenced your decision. We are pleased to say some matters were already in our sights, such as concerns

about home safety and a lack of clarity over repairs responsibilities.

Chair Sean McLaughlin rightly noted in his report that satisfaction across the entire housing sector is markedly down since the pandemic.

We are all living with the fallout: poor health, rocketing prices, high inflation and very different attitudes to how and where people should work. We have to operate as best we can within these changes.

This, however, is a chance for us to improve how we work. Some results indicate changes we have already introduced are hitting the spot. Others show we have much to do.

More on pages 4 and 5



### IT'S FRESH AND IT'S FREE

When you read this we will have held our third free food market in five months with the amazing Felix Project. Dozens of you have turned up for free fresh meat, veg, fruit, puddings and bread valued at over £1,000, collected by Felix from leading retailers like M&S, Morrisons and Hello Fresh. Look on your noticeboard for details of the next free food market.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE YOU WILL FIND...

- 2 Staffing changes key to sharper service delivery
- 3 Spending review finds fairer way to offset rising prices  
One-to-one: meet your chief executive and housing and communities director
- 4 Survey action plan: you've had your say on our services and we're on the case
- 5 Q&A: the background to higher rent and service charges
- 6 Big ticket items: investing in better homes for you over the coming year
- 7 Meet your new housing management team at its Morland Mews base  
Cleaning shared areas and tackling the flytippers
- 8 Looking to move home? Start here!  
Barnsbury HA resident cookbook: share your recipes!

## STAYING SAFE IN YOUR HOME



### TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

You should now have a new **Home health and safety handbook**. But have you read it? If you have, how much do you recall? Try our quiz to test your safety know-how!

- 1 What does carbon monoxide smell like?**

  - a Roses
  - b Burnt toast
  - c Nothing
  - d Methane
- 2 What proportion of house fires start in the kitchen?**

  - a Nearly 90%
  - b Close to 20%
  - c Around half, 48%
  - d None - it's the safest room.
- 3 If you think you can smell gas should you:**

  - a report it to us or Gas Safe engineer Steve Woodgates
  - b call the National Gas Emergency Service at once: ☎0800 111 999
  - c call your neighbour over for a nice cup of tea
  - d go round the house turning off all the lights and power sockets
- 4 It's night and a ground floor window has been broken leaving your home insecure. Should you:**

  - a Call our out-of-hours emergency service: ☎ 0300 131 7300
  - b Cover it as best you can and report it the next morning
  - c Call out a handyman. Pricey but worth the peace of mind
  - d Enjoy the prospect of extra company arriving uninvited.

Turn to page eight to see how many you got right!

## Getting the basics right: staff and contractor roles

We have made some changes to better match staff roles to your services and our resources. Cheryl Whittle explains

Our new staffing structure is designed to make sure all your homes meet new government regulations for home health and safety and that our services meet the new consumer standards and tenant satisfaction measures.

### Changed staffing roles

We have taken on a new housing officer to improve our capacity to better manage your homes and neighbourhoods.

One very painful decision was cutting the post of caretaker. We know you miss Spencer, as do we. We wish him well in his new job.

We will also not be filling the post vacated by Patrick, who has taken up a new job with Brent Council.

The work they did will not stop. Caretaking tasks for example have been divided between other staff, cleaners and contractors. See below to find who now does what.

### ESTATE SERVICES

A new cleaning contractor started working for us last year and we are also taking a much firmer line on antisocial littering and with tenants who fail to pick up after their dogs.

Estate services officer Marius moves to the asset team and will pick up some of the old caretaking tasks. Marius will also offer tighter management of the cleaning and gardening services.

Handyman Steve Woodgate will do small repairs needed around the estate or in shared areas.

Sweeping and cleaning shared areas will be done by the cleaners.

Doves, as of March, is working to a jet-washing schedule covering all our properties.



### HOUSING MANAGEMENT

The team is based at 60 Morland Mews but is regularly out visiting other properties and carrying out Staying Connected visits. See page 7 for more on the new team set-up.

### ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Housing and communities director Cheryl will lead this work, making sure your views and opinions are integrated into decisions on service standards and priorities.

Business support officer Chelsey Simner will give administrative cover, including support for the resident panel and other meetings with tenant groups.

Communications have been outsourced part-time to consultant Lisa Thompson who has for seven years now edited and designed many of our publications, including *Barnsbury News* and your annual calendar and report.

## Warm, safe and cheaper to heat: home improvement spending protected

At the start of this year we carried out a thorough review of our finances, including a detailed calculation of the cost of your services, essential building improvements and energy efficiency measures. Chief executive Susan French reports

My letter to you, sent with this issue of *Barnsbury News*, explains the reason for our decision this year to raise rents and end service charge subsidies.

### Talks with your reps

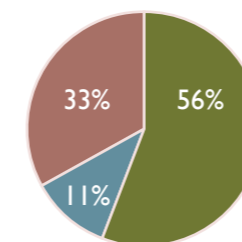
We have in the past week met with your tenant and resident association (TRA) and Highbury View residents.

Both meetings were constructive and we believe our explanations were clearly understood.

On the recommendation of your TRA we are sharing what we told them with you. If you have questions I or my colleague Cheryl will be happy to answer them at our drop in session on 24 April (see right).

## Do the maths: investing now means much lower bills ahead

You have told us you want your homes to be more energy efficient. For two years now it has been our top priority.



Just over half of you - 56% - are satisfied your home is now energy efficient

### Retrofitting works

Retrofit consultant Ambue has now designed detailed energy saving measures for 45 of your homes and is working on designs for another 18. If our budget allows, we will add nine more homes to the programme.

'Our thanks to the 74 of you who have let us in to survey your home and test it for air tightness,' says project manager Avis Venning.

'We will very shortly sign up a contractor,' Avis adds. 'If your home

is on the list for this round of works I will be writing to you personally with a list of the works we will do to make your home warmer.'

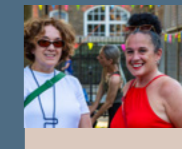
We are also looking to upgrade roofs, guttering and drainage to make our buildings more weather resistant. Our changing climate has brought much heavier downpours, causing far more leaks. A substantial chunk of our budget is now being spent on unscheduled roof repairs.



Heavy downpours have caused far more roof leaks this last year

## TALK DIRECT TO THE TOP TEAM

24 APRIL from 2pm



If you have something to ask our senior staff, pop along to 60 Morland Mews on 24 April. Chief executive Susan French and Cheryl Whittle, our housing and communities director, will be there to listen and answer your questions.

## Wanted: great minds and sparkling talents for a new model fun day

We want to be sure you agree that activities organised for you are a sensible and responsible way to spend your rent. Could there be much less costly ways to have fun?

### NEW MODEL FUN DAY

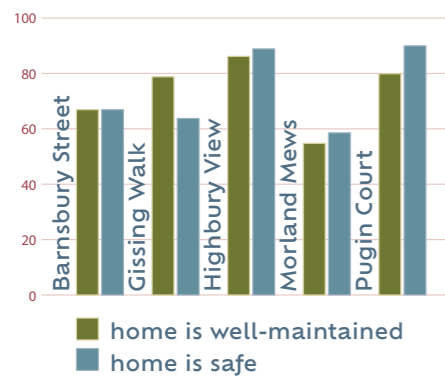
The cost of last year's fun day was £7000. So the fish and chip stand stays, but we're sure you can come up with ideas for a day that is just as entertaining without expensive hired rides. You are nothing if not creative so tell us your ideas for a better value event with a less eye-watering bill. Call or email your brilliant suggestions to us at [info@barnsbury.org](mailto:info@barnsbury.org)

### FOOTBALL COACHING

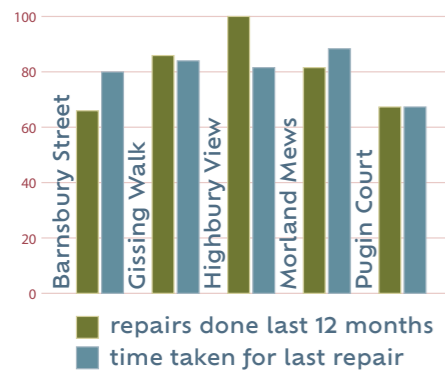
Arsenal's twice yearly football sessions last year cost nearly £3000 and only eight families signed up. The coaching sessions are still available free locally so we will make sure those of you keen to use them know how to sign up.

## SAMPLE SCORES: HOW IT LOOKED IN SOME OF YOUR NEIGHBOURHOODS

### SATISFIED YOUR HOME IS WELL-MAINTAINED & SAFE



### SATISFIED WITH OUR REPAIRS SERVICE



#### \* SAFETY STANDARDS

Last year we brought in specialist experts on one-off contracts to help us bring your homes into line with tough new government safety regulations.

The regulations cover lots of potential risks, from electrics, gas, water, asbestos and fire to damp and mould.

We now have a comprehensive database listing known or suspected risks at all properties.

Extensive inspections have identified where work to remedy a risk is needed and this has been done or work is being scheduled.

# TENANTS SURVEY: THE ACTION PLAN

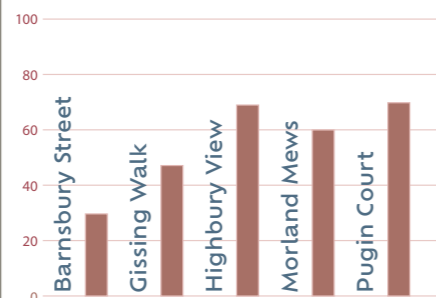
There were few unexpected results in the first survey of your views since 2018. Our ratings overall are down almost exactly in line with those of every other landlord since the pandemic

## ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Our second lowest rating confirms we got it right when we made energy efficiency our top priority.

After two years of rapidly rising fuel bills your score is no surprise. Just 56% of you are satisfied with your home's energy efficiency.

The cost of making your homes warmer and much cheaper to heat is substantial but it will make your household running costs so much lower so we think it worthwhile.



Acuity has given us samples showing satisfaction in different locations with matters like home energy efficiency, as shown here

Those of you living in our coldest modern homes, on the Morland Mews estate, are getting extensive retrofitting. We are match-funding from rents the £0.5 million grant we secured to help pay for this from the government.

Our next task is tackling energy efficiency in other homes. Hardest of all is finding solutions Islington's conservation planners will approve to make our heritage homes energy efficient. We are not giving up.

## REPAIRS

While a sizeable number of you are satisfied, with more recent repairs especially, at 15-18% a clear minority are not. Comments mention problems left to get worse or delays or a lack of action not explained.

A welcome plus was your evident satisfaction with the speed of the last repair. We hope this shows we are moving in the right direction.

Our score for 'safe home' is disappointing and we are looking into this. We know how very important this is. Your comments mention insecure windows or doors, repairs not finished and ongoing damp and mould.

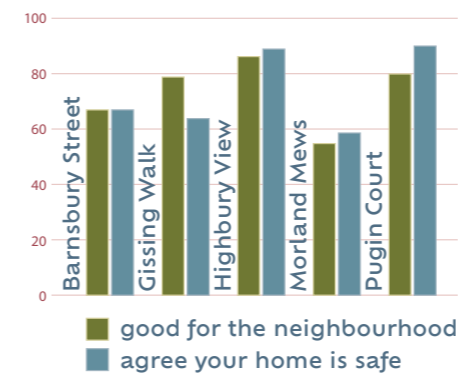
## NEIGHBOURHOOD

Your views on how well your neighbourhood is managed are generally positive, but with some stark differences in some locations (see graph above right).

The same is true for reports of antisocial behaviour. Highbury View, Gissing Walk and Pugin Court rate us highly as making a positive contribution to the neighbourhood. Barnsbury Street and Gissing Walk are least happy with our handling of antisocial behaviour.

Your tenancy conditions are designed to make your home and neighbourhood peaceful and welcoming for all of you. So we are taking a firmer line with tenants who intentionally flout the rules.

## SAFE AND THRIVING



## NEIGHBOURHOODS

We score well for being easy to deal with (79%), treating you fairly and with respect (78%) and keeping you informed (77%), but drop 10 percentage points for listening to your views and acting on them.

Three in four (74%) say we make a positive contribution to your neighbourhood, but 19% disagree.

Asked what one thing we could do to improve, 93 of you replied. Problems with day-to-day repairs got most comments with, right behind it, better communication before starting a repair. It's now over to us to do a much better job of listening to you and acting on what you say. Watch this space.

#### \* CLEARER EXPLANATIONS

It really helps when we are clearer about what we can and cannot do. Last year we published a new guide: *Taking good care of your BHA home*. It sets out what you can expect from us but also says what we expect you to do to keep your home in good repair.

Last month you got a second booklet, this time on home health and safety, telling you how we keep your home safe.

Both guides tell you how to let us know if there is problem - and what to do if you think our response falls short.

## Q&A WHY THE HIKE IN RENT AND SERVICE CHARGES?

### Why have our rents gone up so much when inflation is falling?

We capped last year's rent rise when inflation was much higher. But we also had substantial extra costs including bringing homes into line with new government regulations and repairing damage caused by extreme weather. We know to expect more heavy rain this year. We also need to further invest in making your homes energy efficient and our buildings sturdier and more weather resistant. After a hard look at our budgets and maintenance obligations our board decided to apply the full rent increase, in line with other social landlords. If we did not do so our budgets would not balance and we might no longer be financially viable.

### Couldn't you instead have stopped wasting money?

We looked at some of the things we've been paying for and think there are cheaper ways to get the same outcome. On page three we've listed two of these. Your TRA also came up with some good suggestions. We have, in addition, cut spending this year on staff salaries and our office costs are now far lower.

### My service charge bill has changed hugely. Why?

We applied four tests this year. Is your bill fair: do you pay only for what you get? Are you only asked to pay what we are charged? Is it accurate? And who is accountable for standards?

Here's what we found. For years none of you have paid the full cost of services. Last year alone we spent £150,000 subsidising them. We found some of you paying for services you don't get. Basement flat tenants paying for lighting and heating parts of the building where they never set foot. We've stopped that so the other tenants now share the bill. We have for now capped the weekly increase at £12 a week but want to talk to all of you to agree ways to keep costs down where you live.

We want to hear more from you about the standard of work done. Are the floors and windows in your shared areas cleaned properly? Are shrubs, planters, trees and lawns well tended? Tell us what you think at [keepingitclean@barnsbury.org](mailto:keepingitclean@barnsbury.org) or call us on 020 7704 2324.

### EXTRA COSTS WE HAD TO COVER LAST YEAR

- \* £104,000 on fire safety works, with more works needed this year
- \* £300,000 repairing roofs, with a sharp rise in leaks caused by much more intense downpours
- \* £85,000 raising empty homes to a higher standard, including £30,000 spent on one home left uninhabitable by the previous tenant
- \* remedial work to make homes safe after DIY done unauthorised by tenants.

## AROUND THE HOUSES

# Repairs underway: damp and mould works, community safety, smarter shared spaces and more

Alongside £500,000 going on energy efficiency works, we will this year spend another £420,000 on planned improvements. Asset manager **Michael Bunker** takes us through the big ticket items

New cloud-based **CCTV** will be installed at Morland Mews, Gissing Walk, 170 Liverpool Road and Highbury View, giving high-definition footage and much improved long term storage and video retrieval.

### Damp remedies

Work continues on damp and mould problems reported last year, but also a few new cases reported this year. All are treated as priorities.

We have a planned programme for decorating shared areas in all your buildings that will run up to and including 2029. Liverpool Road and Barnsbury Street will be among the first to see these improvements.

Internal upgrades are also on the cards. We are planning to replace

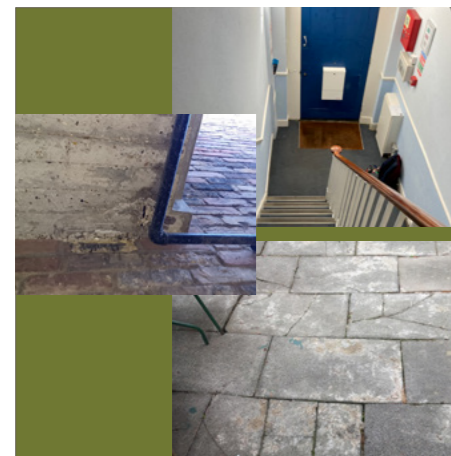
seven kitchens, seven bathrooms and seven boilers in homes rated most now in need of an upgrade or if a tenant needs adaptations to cope with declining mobility.

Replacement lighting continues at all properties, stripping out older inefficient lights and fitting better, brighter energy-saving LED lamps.

### Across the board upgrades

These are just some of the works planned. Our contractors will also be improving fire doors, upgrading electrics, clearing or replacing gutters and protective boarding and pruning some overgrown trees.

If the building you live in is one of those affected, our assets team will be writing to you direct.



### Quick fixes!

Stairwells will be freshly painted at Liverpool Road and Barnsbury Street, where tenants will also get a say on new floor coverings.

Concrete will be fixed at Gissing Walk where an expert has found corrosion and other minor defects

New paving stones will be fitted in a Barnsbury Street patio, replacing these trip hazards.

**SUSPECT A GAS LEAK?  
THIS IS AN EMERGENCY!**

Call the National Gas Emergency Service **NOW** on 0800 111 999.

If they judge it necessary they will send out a Cadent engineer.

## Struggling with household bills? We can help

### BHA hardship fund

This is a small pot of money we can use to help you with emergencies. You will need to complete a form and show proof of genuine hardship.

### Islington council resident support scheme

We can help you apply for support from the council. The criteria are strict but you could get furniture, energy, food vouchers or white goods. You might also qualify for a discretionary housing payment towards your rent, though the conditions are very strict.

### Free internet by mobile

You can apply to us for a mobile phone sim card if you have no other way to use the internet, thanks to charity Good Foundations. <https://tinyurl.com/5e3rsskk>

### Energy voucher

If you have a power bill you can't pay or the meter is empty, you can apply for a voucher supplied to us by a national housing charity.

Call us on 020 7704 2324 or [info@barnsbury.org](mailto:info@barnsbury.org)

### Local expert help and advice you can contact directly

Help on your doorstep gives advice and help with budgeting and debt. 020 3931 6080 text 075 6405 5065 [connect@helponyourdoorstep.com](mailto:connect@helponyourdoorstep.com)

For energy saving advice give SHINE a call 020 7527 2001 [shine@islington.gov.uk](mailto:shine@islington.gov.uk)

For help and advice on money matters call the Islington Money advice team 020 7527 8600.

## Keeping the places you share safe, smart and clean

Last year, after a lot of complaints about cleaning standards, we signed up a new cleaning contractor.

### Good start

Early days feedback was very good but we don't want standards to slip so send us your feedback at:

[keepingitclean@barnsbury.org](mailto:keepingitclean@barnsbury.org)

The cleaning teams are working to a fortnightly schedule (weekly at Highbury View and Ronalds Road). You can find the dates and times for your building on your noticeboard.

A reminder that we expect all of you to help keep shared areas tidy and smart, as most of you do.



Trip hazards and a vermin risk spotted by our staff last month. The new CCTV cameras now being installed will be a big help to staff investigating problems like those pictured here.

### GOOD MANNERS GO FAR

We are very upset to report more threats and abuse have been directed at staff in some neighbourhoods.

Happily most of you are friendly, polite and courteous. Thank you. We really do appreciate it.

To the tiny number who think abusing or threatening staff is acceptable this is a clear breach of your tenancy. We will not tolerate it.

## Housing staff regularly out and about in your neighbourhoods

### INTRODUCING THE NEW TEAM LINE-UP

The housing management team has a new line up, with new housing officer Nicky Anderson working five days a week from 60 Morland Mews.

'Tenants have told me they're very happy to have someone here and I hope catching small problems early on will stop them escalating,' says Nicky, who joined us in March.

### Division of labour



The team, pictured, is now Nicky, housing and communities manager **Asif Mahmood** and independent living officer **Colette Lyons**. Supporting you and the team with tenant engagement will be business support officer **Chelsey Simner**.

Nicky is first point of call on most matters for general needs housing and is also our eyes and ears on the ground. Contact her about paying your rent or about another tenancy matter, getting support or any wider neighbourhood concerns.

'I'm here for all of you,' Nicky says, 'not just those who need support. My door is open and I'm regularly out visiting all our properties.'

Colette has a similar role serving older tenants at Highbury View.

Asif will pick up more complex rent and housing management issues.

You can all expect a **Staying Connected** visit from one of the team. They are done once every 12 months on a rota that began last autumn. 'We've done 52 already,' says Asif. 'The biggest plus was being able to help with the cost of living crisis, hardship and getting people services they didn't know they could use like aids and adaptations.'

The visits are a regulatory 'must do'. But, as Asif adds, we never see or hear from some of you. 'We want to catch up, check we have your contact details right and ask how you think we can best serve your community.'

**Respect your neighbourhood** Both express concern over the expectation of some that others will pick up their mess. 'If someone isn't picking up after their dog, tell us because that really is a tenancy matter,' Asif says.

Of tenants caught flytipping last year he says: 'They got breach of tenancy letters and picked up the rubbish they'd left.' Anyone dumping rubbish or furniture or failing to clear up after a pet this year can expect a similarly tough line.

Contact the team at 020 7704 2324 or [info@barnsbury.org](mailto:info@barnsbury.org)

### TELL US HOW OUR LAST REPAIR WENT AND YOU COULD WIN £50!

If we sent someone out to do a repair for you recently tell us how it went and you could win £50 in our next prize draw. Your reply will also help us spot and fix flaws in our service.

<https://tinyurl.com/bharepairs23>



Use your mobile phone camera to scan the QR code

## BOOK CLUB



### Coming soon, if you help out: *the Bumper Book of Barnsbury HA recipes*

Janice Walsh on the resident panel has had a great idea: a **book of your favourite recipes**. Maybe one handed down the generations or a masterpiece you have created?

If you have a recipe or want to help put the book together get in touch with Chelsey at [info@barnsbury.org](mailto:info@barnsbury.org)

FROM PAGE 2, THE ANSWERS:

### YOUR HOME HEALTH AND SAFETY TEST

- 1 **C** | Carbon monoxide (CO) has no smell or taste. If the alarm goes off it's an emergency. Turn off all gas appliances and open windows and doors. Call the *National Gas Emergency Number* on ☎ **0800 111 999**.
- 2 **C** | Unwatched cooking is easily the main cause of house fires.
- 3 **B** | This is an emergency. Call the *National Gas Emergency Number* on ☎ **0800 111 999**. Do **not** turn on or off any electric switches as this can send out tiny sparks.
- 4 **A** | Trick question to see if you read last year's *Taking care of your BHA home* booklet. This is a safety emergency. The out-of-hours service will fix a temporary cover to 'make safe'. The full repair will be organised the next morning.

### SMOKE, HEAT AND CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS SAVE LIVES

Please test your alarms once a month. If you do not have a working smoke, heat or CO alarm tell us. ☎ 020 7704 2324 or email [info@barnsbury.org](mailto:info@barnsbury.org)

## BARNSBURY HA HOMES ON OFFER FOR A SWAP

Where it is	Size/style of home	Tenant wants...
three-storey block with shared main entrance on Lofting Road: 13-23	one bedroom, first floor flat with own balcony	one bedroom ground floor property due to health reasons
three-storey block with shared main entrance on Morland Mews: 9-21	one bedroom, first floor flat with own balcony	one bedroom, ground floor property
Gissing Walk	three bedroom house with two double bedrooms and one single bedroom	larger three bedroom property
Building with shared main entrance at 60-62 Barnsbury Street	very spacious five bedroom home on the third floor	two bedroom property on the ground floor, ideally
Gissing Walk	two bedroom house with two double bedrooms and front door to walkway	three bedrooms needed for growing family
Barnsbury Street	three bedroom house with two double bedrooms and one single, no shared door but shared use of courtyard	one bedroom flat with a courtyard garden
Gissing Walk	spacious studio flat with separate kitchen and bathroom, small storage cupboard and front door opening to walkway	one bedroom property
Claringbull Court	two bedroom adapted property with stairlift. Spacious bedrooms and living area	one bedroom ground-floor property

If you'd like to move home we keep a list of tenants who want to swap. If you want to move to one of our smaller homes there are other ways we can help you and can offer a special package of incentives. Contact Asif for details of both options at [info@barnsbury.org](mailto:info@barnsbury.org) or call ☎ 020 7704 2324.

### DON'T PUT UP WITH DOMESTIC ABUSE

#### SOLACE IN ISLINGTON ☎ 0808 802 5565

If you need free, confidential support because of domestic abuse call Solace in Islington. Solace helps women and men.

[advocacy@solacewomensaid.org](mailto:advocacy@solacewomensaid.org)

Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm.

IF YOU ARE IN DANGER  
NOW CALL THE POLICE ☎ 999

### GET IN TOUCH WITH US

If you have a story, letter, picture or suggestion for *Barnsbury News* get in touch with editor Lisa Thompson by email at [Lisa@barnsbury.org](mailto:Lisa@barnsbury.org) or call her on ☎ 020 7704 2324

You can get in touch with any of our staff by email at [info@barnsbury.org](mailto:info@barnsbury.org) or ☎ 020 7704 2324.

Contact us through our website [barnsbury.org/about/contact/](http://barnsbury.org/about/contact/) Or if you prefer the post write to 4-6 Colebrooke Place, NI 8HZ.