Barnsbury News



Free * Quarterly * In-house news & events * Spring 2023 * Issue Nº 15

BREAKING NEWS: Funding win will 'retrofit' our coldest Morland Mews homes

In welcome news the government has approved our funding bid for works to **cut the cost of heating** some of our coldest homes

The £500,000 secured, topped up by a matching contribution from BHA, will cover the cost of insulating some of our coldest modern homes.

Big win for a small landlord

'The grant is probably the largest awarded to any small English housing association,' chief executive Susan French said, 'so we are very pleased.'

The bid rules mean only homes now rated D for energy efficiency qualified for funding. So some of you might get

work done but a neighbour in a home rated slightly higher might miss out.

The work now being planned will include draught-proofing, insulating lofts, better ventilation and fitting solar panels on parts of the estate. We think it unlikely anyone will have to move out while the work is being done.

We will hold a meeting in spring when we have more detail so can answer any questions. We have to spend the money by summer 2025 so work will likely start later this year.



This gorgeous magnolia has put on a glorious display in Milner Square's shared garden, now getting loving care from tenant Helen. Helen has put in a bid for an Islington Giving Make It Happen grant to help cover the cost of more of the work needed. She has already done lots of ground work, with a neighbour helping put up a trellis. See page 3 for how to apply for funds for projects similar to this at Milner Square

INSIDE THIS ISSUE YOU WILL FIND ...

2 Money saving tips: borrow don't buy, where to find the best deals, setting a budget for meals and more...



We aim for excellence but sometimes fall short: lessons learned from your complaints



Meet your neighbour: writer and former police officer Joan Lock

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Events and activities across Islington and a call for volunteers

Inflation forces reluctant rent hike. New office: how to get in touch with our staff



Meet new finance director Lynsey Van Aswegen, home safety advice, home care and repairs explained

Opinion: does BHA have too many talking shops? Not so, says chief executive Susan French

Find out more *** barnsbury.org**

April start for council's new resident advice and support hubs

Access Islington Hub, a new service opening on 3 April, will be giving out free advice and support on lots of vital matters, from money, food and family to work and wellbeing.

Drop in or book ahead

You can drop in at an advice and support surgery at the Islington South Hub at Finsbury Library or book ahead for an advice and guidance session. You can also speak to a hub adviser if you want help finding the service or support that will work best for you.

-----Access Islington South Hub opens on 3 April at Finsbury Library at 245 St John Street, London EC1V 4NB. To find out more about the new hub see www.islingtonfairertogether.org/ services/access-islington-hubs

Are *money worries* affecting your mental health? Ask our housing management team for help or try Hub of Hope. **>>** p8

Dreading your next water bill? Could you qualify for a Thames Water cap or discount? **>> p8**

FIND OUT MORE ON PAGE 8

BARNSBURY HA DROP-IN **HELP & ADVICE SURGERY**

For information and advice on issues affecting you, come along to our drop-in advice surgery at 60 Morland Mews. There will be plenty of time to ask questions and private space is available for any confidential discussions.

NEXT SURGERY:

WEDNESDAY 5 APRIL **11AM TO 1PM**

60 MORLAND MEWS LONDON N1 1HN

SAVVY TIPS FOR BUDGETING



Pennies and pounds: could you spend less?

BORROW INSTEAD OF BUYING

Instead of buying something you might use rarely or just once, why not borrow? Good examples might be tools, books or sports equipment.

- **Library of things:** Offers for a one-off fee tools and equipment for DIY, decorating, cleaning, sewing, home entertainment and more. www.libraryofthings.co.uk/
- * Community Tool Bank. Pay a small fee and you can borrow tools as needed from the toolbank at Hugh Cubitt community centre.
- * Ask friends and neighbours: If they own what you need could you borrow it? Or maybe a friend is struggling to think of a birthday gift for you!

KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR DEALS

If you go shopping, keep an eye out for money-off deals and vouchers. * If you haven't done so already

- sign up for tips from moneysaving expert Martin Lewis at www.moneysavingexpert.com
- If you shop online try a free service called **Honey** to find codes for vouchers which it collects from over 30,000 websites www.joinhoney.com/
- Ask services you use regularly if they can offer you a better deal. If this fails, threaten to cancel. This works over the phone and sometimes online too.



ENERGY-EFFICIENT GADGETS & APPLIANCES SAVE MONEY

Electricity and gas bills are one of every household's biggest expenses. So energy-efficient gadgets will save money and cut your carbon footprint.

LED light bulbs use much less power than older bulbs. Other good savers are Energy Star-rated appliances and smart thermostats*, that switch off the heating when your home reaches the target temperature. You will first need our permission to install smart thermostats.

PLAN WEEKLY MEALS AHEAD

This can help you save money on groceries and curb impulse buying.

- * Make a list of the meals you are going to make each week and buy only what you need.
- If some items only come prewrapped and you have more than you need, maybe split the bag (and cost) with a neighbour?

PAY OFF ANY MONEY YOU OWE

With inflation so high interest rates on any loans or debts cost far more than normal. Make it a priority to pay off as fast as you can high-interest debts like credit cards and personal loans.

If you really need a loan, London Capital Credit Union may be able to offer a lower rate than most highstreet banks. BHA is a partner with London Capital Credit Union. If you open an account with them tell them you're a Barnsbury Housing Association tenant. They'll chip in a tenner and so will we so you get an extra £20, no strings attached. barnsbury.org/news-post/ lccu-barnsbury-save-money/

Lessons learnt from the last year's service lapses

Despite our best intentions we don't always give you the best quality service. Homes and communities director Viv Astall explains what we'll do to put things right and what lessons were learnt

If one of our staff or a contractor slips up your complaint about it gives us a way to put things right, learn from the mistakes made and make our service better for you all.

Total complaints in 2022/23

We were sent 10 complaints between April 2022 and March 2023. Of these an assessment found:



What were the concerns you complained about? Four complaints were about matters linked to your home. This is usually the cause of the highest number of complaints, given it is our core business so the reason you and we are more likely to contact each other.

not upheld repairs 2 staff behaviour 2 communication

upheld

FREE TICKETS FOR SNOW WHITE LONDON CHILDREN'S BALLET AT THE PEACOCK THEATRE

THURSDAY 13 APRIL 1PM

We have free tickets to giveaway for this fabulous performance by talented dancers aged nine to 15.

For tickets email engagement & communications manager Patrick on patrick@barnsbury. org or call 📞 020 7704 2324.

new project for Islington? Islington Giving's Make it Happen funding is again available and open to applications for Islington projects involving local residents. Local projects funded by slington Giving in past years have included a gardening project for refugee children, a community pizza oven and a podcast capturing local lives.

make-it-happen-fund/

We responded to nine within the 10-day target, with the person who made the tenth complaint told our response would be delayed.

Complaints that went to the second stage Five complaints went to the second

stage of our procedure. Of these:



antisocial behaviour

our processes

Have you got plans in the making for a great

https://islingtongiving.org.uk/

What we learnt from the matters you reported to us in the last 12 months

A review of all complaints showed the same theme coming up again and again: communication. We need to better understand what you expect from us when we communicate and how you prefer us to communicate with you. We think the best starting point is getting to know you better.

One way we are doing this is with scheduled tenancy visits, which we began last year. We will do more this year. The aim is to get to know you, discuss with you any issues you're having with your home and any other problems. We know most people will at some point in their lives have a problem with mental health so that is something we could also talk about.



During the year we found it hard to get repairs completed quickly. Materials and parts were in short supply as was skilled labour. What we found from this was

that keeping in regular contact with contractors led to faster repairs. Likewise, we should have kept you updated: what was being done and when, any hold-ups and reasons for them and the likely completion date.



We found some of the information on our IT system was out of date and this was

leading to errors on our part when we tried to contact some of you. We are working through the system to check all information on it is up to date.



We learned not to assume that we know what you want done in your neighbourhood.

We will now speak to those of you who live on an estate before we step in with changes.



We have standards for behaviour and values we expect all our staff to uphold.

We will work with our staff to make sure all of these are understood and applied in their daily work and personal conduct.

MEET YOUR BARNSBURY HA NEIGHBOUR



JOAN LOCK

Where did you grow up?

My parents were northerners who moved south but my father took us up to Barrow-in-Furness during the war, for the work but also hoping to avoid bombing.

He was then called up to nurse Japanese prisoners of war and my mother took us to Newcastle-upon-Tyne. I had moved between 10 schools so didn't pass my 11 Plus. I wanted to be a journalist but there was no hope of that so I worked in various shops then decided to be a nurse like my mother.

How did you end up with the police?

My parents gave me a trip to Paris for my 21st birthday. Passing through London I saw a policewoman sheltering in a doorway. I already wanted to move south because I was seeing a bloke who was a journalist but suddenly decided to join the police. I got accepted because I was a registered nurse and what you learn is very useful in the police force.

What was that like in the 1950s?

Very limited for a policewoman but I covered central/west end. We mainly looked out for runaway girls and those that made their way to London for the bright lights. We patrolled all the time so picked up whatever was there, say an accident or drunk and disorderly.

Despite an erratic early years education, Joan Lock has made her name as a respected author, inspired in good part by her work as a woman police officer. Patrick Penny-Annang hears Joan's story

How long were you an officer?

I was a police officer for six years. People were fascinated by policewomen, always asking what you'd done. I saw it as my chance so wrote an autobiographical book. Publisher Michael Joseph took it straight away.

What inspired your writing?

Picture this: a group who've all failed our 11 Plus sitting in a classroom and not feeling very good. I'd missed so much moving schools, like learning my ABC. So here comes the teacher. Mr McAndrew had been demobbed from the air force. He goes around the room and talks to everybody.



Above left, Joan with some of the many books she has written and, right, on duty in 1950s London

He sat with me and my writing was like bad hieroglyphics. I had to interpret it and he said: 'I don't understand how someone can write something that brilliant but can't learn real writing.' He found things people could do so he was the catalyst.

How was your first book received?

In my innocence I expected it to be in every single shop but now realise I did get a lot of attention, because of the interest in policewomen. I had two interviews on television, one with Michael Aspel slotted between [actor] Bernard Miles and [psychedelic rock musicians] The Elastic Band.

What kept you writing?

There are a lot of ups and downs especially if you're new to the field. I always had a part-time job and it helped when I joined the Crime Writers Association because it gave you helpful ideas so I did talks for Woman's Hour, BBC World Service and local radio.

Reluctant Nightingale followed, which was about my experience of nursing, but I then noticed no-one had written a history of British policewomen so thought I'll do that.

I soon realised why. It was fiendishly complex. Research was also much harder then but I found stuff that had never been picked up. It took nearly three years but my reward was being first in the field.

It was remarkable how disjointed the forces were with big differences depending on senior male officers. Some of them wouldn't have anything to do with women officers. Gloucestershire's chief constable was brilliant. He covered a big area so had policewomen out on motorcycles.

Was that part of your motivation?

There was a lot of interesting history and I also did several articles and a regular page for Police Review, then the leading police magazine. It was brought to life in about 1890 by someone who felt the police ought to have somewhere they could have their say. But there weren't many standing up for policewoman. That was a big part of what kept me going. *

After The British Policewoman was published in 1979. Joan wrote several more non-fiction books about policing and crime. She also wrote radio plays for the BBC and others broadcasters then became in-house journalist for John Lewis Partnership. On retiring Joan turned her hand to fiction, completing an impressive eight crime novels. _______



Help is at hand: Marie Curie support for people with a terminal illness

Marie Curie's helper service gives support to anyone living with a terminal illness from friendly, well-trained volunteers. The service is free and its only aim is to make life easier for people with a life-limiting illness. If you know someone who might find the service useful, please refer them to Marie Curie. They also accept self-referrals.

C. 020 7091 4135

 \square londonvolunteering@mariecurie.org.uk

PLUS: CALL FOR MORE VOLUNTEERS TO HELP OTHER PEOPLE IN NEED

Might you or someone you know want to volunteer with Marie Curie? They will provide training and all it needs is three-hours of your time a week which vou'll spend helping, chatting with or just being a friendly ear for someone terminally ill.



For details please go to mariecurie.org.uk/helper

60 MORLAND MEWS Wellness Course



Staying fit is a great way to improve your mood and health

Many people struggle to stay fit in troublesome times but with a little commitment and some fun motivation you can improve and maintain your fitness for years to come!

Come join us for free sessions and reviving refreshments.

07443 903 237 **Tuesdays 10-11am**

PARK CUPPA » **GILLESPIE PARK** ECOLOGY CENTRE

Fancy a change? **Age UK Islington** is hosting **PARK CUPPA**, a new event at the Ecology Centre in Gillespie Park, once a month, from 10.30am-12pm.

Enjoy a cup of tea and a chat with locals in the centre. It's free and open to all. No need to book – just turn up!

Mornings from 10.30am on the second Tuesday of every month at Islington Ecology Centre, 191 Drayton Park Rd, N55 1PH



Find out more *** barnsbury.org**

FREE TICKETS FOR LONDON ZOO!!



We have free tickets for London Zoo. Get in touch with us to find out if you're eligible. As part of the deal you'll be asked to fill in a short survey for us and the zoo. Max five tickets per household.

Email patrick@barnsbury.org or call © 07926 130 067 for details.

ARSENAL FOOTBALI COACHING FOR KIDS 4&5 APRIL 10AM TO 3PM

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS, AGE 8-11

Arsenal in the Community is offering **two free coaching** sessions for kids (4, 5 April) plus a **free Emirates stadium** tour on 13 April at 12.30pm.

Sessions start **10am** and end **3pm.** with one hour for lunch Lunch is provided free.

To register call & 07926 130 067 or email patrick@barnsbury.org

SPACES LIMITED. CONTACT PATRICK TO BOOK A SPACE.





GET INTO DANCE

YEAR ROUND, CHANCES TO JOIN IN THE FUN OR ENJOY A SHOW SADLERS WELLS/PEACOCK THEATRE

If you love dance and haven't tried Get Into Dance why not give it a go? It's open to all local residents no matter your age or physical ability and, at £3 a ticket, it's a great deal!

If you're already a member book your tickets direct from the Sadlers Wells ticket office. If you'd like to be a member we can refer you. For details and more information email patrick@barnsbury.org

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AROUND THE HOUSES

Steep hike in running costs behind reluctant rent increase

You should all by now have received a letter from us advising you of a 7% rise in rental charges for the next 12 months

Our management team and board thought long and hard before agreeing to the increase. It was not an easy decision but we have to be able to cover our rising costs and invest in the priorities we have agreed.

Chief among these is cutting the costs to you all of heating and powering your homes by making them more energy efficient. We also need to keep all your homes safe and maintained to a decent standard.

The 7% rise follows a steep rise in our bills and those of our contractors and suppliers. The cost of building materials especially is being pushed up by global shortage of raw materials, and by rising production, energy and labour costs.

Contact our housing management team if you need advice or help with financial matters. Phone **© 020 7704** 2324 or why not try our drop-in advice service (advert on page 2).

NEW HEAD OFFICE: 4-6 COLEBROOKE PLACE N1 8HZ

020 7704 2324 info@barnsbury.org barnsbury.org

Next steps for you

- * If you get housing benefit, you will need to tell your contact at Islington Council your new rent.
- * If you claim universal credit you will need to report it to the DWP (Department of Work and Pensions).
- * If you pay your rent by standing order, you should by now have told your bank or building society the new payment amount.

Service charges going up

Service charges are also rising. We have checked your tenancy agreement and our records but if you do spot in our letter to you a charge for a service you don't get, tell us and we will investigate.

The charge is calculated using the cost of each service to us last year with an allowance for higher costs we know will come about this year.

BARNSBURY

Specialist help on benefits, budgets and money woes now available in-house

We are very pleased to introduce Sandra Sokolovic, our new rent income officer, who joined us in March. Sandra had a similar role in her last job with Hammersmith & Fulham Council and before that with Citizens Advice. Sandra will be working a four-day week (Tuesday to Friday but not Mondays). In the next issue we'll introduce you properly!

Consultation over Morland Mews parking now completed

Consultation over our proposed improvements to parking at Morland Mews has now ended. Thank you to the 15 tenants who sent thoughtful and constructive comments on our proposals.

DID YOU KNOW?

Smoke alarms can cut by 90% the risk of death. The London Fire Brigade says most deadly fires happen in homes that do not have working smoke alarms.

Head office now moved lock, stock, and barrel (and staff) to the Angel

In January we moved to new shared premises in the Angel which we share with Partners for Improvement in Islington. Our phone number has not changed.

Meeting staff by appointment

The office is not suited to drop-in callers but 60 Morland Mews is still open for business if you need to speak to one of us in person during working hours. Any of our staff there will be happy to pass on a message to a colleague or report a repair for you.

If you prefer to meet face-to-face we can come to your home or book the meeting room in Colebrooke Place so anything we discuss is kept confidential. Please phone us or email so we can agree a convenient time.

Ending our lease on the Cloudesley Road office will see us make a substantial saving on office costs, leaving more to invest in energy saving measures for your homes and direct help for those of you in financial hardship.

Staying safe and sound: our 'must do' checklist for every householder

DAMP AND MOULD

Please tell us if there is any damp or mould inside your home so we can find the cause and repair it or find a remedy. Do not ignore black mould. It may be a serious health risk.

_____ WINDOW SAFETY

Please let us know if for child safety you need any window limiters or restrictors fitted to one or more windows in your home.

We will supply two keys for every home so you can open the windows fully if and when needed.

_____ **FIRE SAFETY**

Fire door inspections

We will soon start our annual inspection of all fire doors fitted in flats and our quarterly inspection of fire doors in shared parts of buildings.

Fire safety risks

If you spot anything in your building that you think might pose a fire safety risk please report it to us.

Monthly alarm tests

Please test your **smoke**, heat and CO2 detector alarms once a month. Press and hold down the test button. The alarm should sound loudly, a steady green light should be on with a red light flashing every 40 seconds. Ring us if there is a fault and we will send someone to fix it. If your smoke detector starts bleeping, don't take the head off. Call us and we will replace it. These services are free.

To call the repairs team in working hours ring 6020 7704 2324

SUSPECT A GAS LEAK?

This is an emergency. Call the National Gas Emergency Service NOW on 📞 0800 111 999.

I have worked in housing for more than 12 years and really enjoy the mix of thinking about bricks and mortar and about people. Before joining the team here I was chief finance officer at Octavia, a west London housing association, and before that worked for Peabody, one of London's biggest social housing providers.

What do you bring to your work?

I am passionate about social justice and finding ways to solve society's inequalities. I grew up in a somewhat disadvantaged northern town and firmly believe education opened up opportunities for me and raised my aspirations, so I want to help other people have these opportunities too.

What does your job involve?

I look after all our finances, from making sure we have enough cash to pay the bills to working on our 30-year financial plan and how we will invest in your homes into the future. I also look after IT and am always looking for new ways to be efficient and better shape our services for you.

Repairs and home care: our new leaflet sets out your responsibilities and ours

We have a helpful new leaflet setting | It is your job to repair your own out how we expect you to care for your home and any outdoor space that is for your use only.

Please take the time to read it so you are clear about tasks and repairs that are your responsibiity and those you must report to us.

Commonsense approach

Most of the tasks we ask you to do are designed to prevent problems, like keeping your home and outside areas you use, tidy and well cared for and making sure others in your home do the same.

We expect you to mend minor breakages and faults and report to us repairs that are our responsibility.

LYNSEY VAN ASWEGEN

What values drive you?

I recently came back from maternity leave and while I was off I took some personality tests. So it seems my top five values are honesty, humility, kindness, love of learning and humour! I think that pretty much sums me up.

Cats or doos?

Dogs 100%. We have just moved to the countryside after living in Camden for 15 years. Everyone has a dog here!

Name your top three favourite podcasts/books?

I'm not much of a reader but the first three podcasts on my subscription list are Newscast, Michelle Visage's Rule Breakers and (a guilty pleasure) Scarlett Moffatt Wants to Believe.

What do you enjoy outside work?

I teach dance and Pilates. I love helping kids and adults learn a new skill and be more active. If you are ever on a video call with me, you'll see my home office doubles up as a dance studio, complete with ballet barre and pilates equipment!

appliances and other goods.

We have given helpful tips, ways to avoid problems getting out of hand and where to find help with a repair if you cannot do it yourself.

We will only carry out repairs that are your responsibility if there is a significant risk to health and safety or leaving the repair unchecked would further damage our property.

Phone or email us if you'd like us to pop the new leaflet through your letterbox. & 020 7704 2324 ☐ info@barnsbury.org. You can also download the leaflet from https://barnsbury.org/residentinformation/policies-procedures/

OPINION

Too many talking shops?

Outgoing Barnsbury HA TRA chair Liam O'Dowd has said we have too many **'talking shops'**, arguing that two tenant associations are sufficient. Chief executive **Susan French** respectfully disagrees

Tenant and resident associations play a highly valued and important role as a voice for tenants, particularly on issues that affect smaller groups of you in neighbouring properties.

Tenant-led associations

With a little support from Patrick, Highbury View's TRA is organising its own events. Patrick is also trying to help get the BHA TRA meeting again. I'm keen to attend its next meeting and hope the current difficulties can be overcome.

However we have found, as have most other landlords, that we need other more flexible or direct ways to get feedback and ideas from you. Many of you don't want to go to formal meetings so turnout tends to be low. You may not have time, you might feel out of place or maybe think you don't share the same concerns.

So we've been trying to give you more choice. For repairs and antisocial behaviour, we do surveys. We pull together small groups of you to look at very specific matters and this feedback feeds directly into how we plan or reform a policy or service. Later this year you will all be invited to take part in our tenants survey.

Tenant board members Janice, Chris and Fenan get tenants' views heard at board meetings.

The resident panel scrutinises in detail our policies so they will work for you. They tell us what they think will and won't work and why some of our current efforts might be falling flat.

What we do need to do much better is explain how very effective the resident panel and tenant board members are. We will report on that in the summer issue of *Barnsbury News*.

Is that enough? We think not. Patrick is working on a strategy for engaging you in all aspects of our work. Will it cover all points? Will it be clear and ambitious? Above all, do you think it will work?

We will be in touch shortly to get your feedback on the draft strategy. Every comment and suggestion will help us knock it into better shape. So, even well in advance, thank you!

WHAT DID WE MISS?

What would you like to read about in our next newsletter? Is there an article or news story

you would you like to write for *Barnsbury News*?

Do you know any local community projects or events of interest to other Barnsbury HA tenants?

If you've answered yes to any of these please get in touch with engagement & comms manager Patrick on patrick@barnsbury. org or call **\$**020 7704 2324.

DOMESTIC ABUSE

SOLACE IN ISLINGTON CALL THE LONDON FREEPHONE © 0808 802 5565

IF YOU ARE IN DANGER NOW CALL THE POLICE \$\$999

For free, confidential support because of domestic abuse, call Solace in Islington.

Solace helps men and women.

Call & 020 3795 5070 or email advocacy@ solacewomensaid.org Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm.

If it all gets too much: how to get help with mental health anxieties

It'll be no surprise to any of you that money worries can trigger anxiety or depression or disturb your sleep.

Problem shared

You might feel shame, guilt or low self-esteem. Please don't bottle it up. Our housing management team can help. Even just asking for support and taking steps to manage your financial woes can help your mental health.

Remember it's okay to ask for help with your mental health. Try Hub of Hope to find support available near you: //hubofhope.co.uk/

Water bills: does your household qualify for a special discount?

Thames Water's **Water Help** scheme could cut your annual water bill in half if the combined income of everyone in your home is less than £21,749 (before tax or any other deductions are taken off).

There is a second money-saver, called **Water Sure**, which might cap your water bill. This one is for:

- people eligible for any meanstested benefit
- people with a medical condition treated using extra water
- or families with three or more under 19s if they are eligible for child benefits.

The cap won't help if you use very little water but would stop your water bill rising above £456 this year.

If you think you might qualify for either scheme get in touch with our housing management team. We will help you apply and will send off your application form.

For more on Water Help or Water Sure see www.thameswater.co.uk/ help/account-and-billing/financialsupport/waterhelp

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Find out more *** barnsbury.org**