

Letters

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Homes for Islington Staff are to blame for these errors

Last week Dr Brian Potter asked if Homes for Islington (HfI) directors were qualified to award large maintenance contracts. The question arose after the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal slashed some leaseholder's bills by up to 60 per cent. As Dr Potter pointed out, if the leaseholders were being overcharged, so too were rent-paying tenants.

One might think that Dr Potter has asked the right question. After all, the directors did take the final decision and they did sign the contracts on behalf of HfI as a company. The reality is a bit more complex and may give us cause for thought.

The directors were essentially non-executive, meaning that they did not get involved with day-to-day work or details. This was broadly similar to elected councillors and MPs. In this sense there is no requirement for any of them to be 'qualified'. Indeed, there is no qualification for being a public representative.

All public representatives, including HfI's directors, are dependent upon the

Letter of the week

Name and shame those who are wasting public money

Your 'Millions wasted' front page headline (April 12) followed by 'Dog Squad ... action on the streets' on page five again proves the disgraceful waste of Islington Council's 'public funds'.

Even if the 22 dog wardens were employed at the minimum wage (£8.70 x 40 hours = £348, x 13 weeks = £4,524, x 22 wardens = £99,528) it would show that £140,472 was being spent on "training for more than a month at a boot camp". Pure overkill – suggesting a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

I have personal knowledge that Hammersmith and Fulham Council only employed four dog wardens to keep parks, streets and estates clean, and they

attended courses at Battersea Park police, not a month's holiday at a boot camp.

This figure is on top of the £50,000 spent on Islington Council's ineffectual consultation process, plus the unknown figure for the additional follow-up work and the 'tenants' champion' saga and all the other meaningless 'consultancy partnerships' that have been used in the past few years that have cost Islington residents a fortune.

This continuing waste takes place at the same time as the council is using draconian measures:

- Charging drivers just under £10million in parking tickets and penalty fines.
- Cutting budgets for



■ Cllr Paul Smith launching zero tolerance of dog fouling

essential services, such as £30,000 needed to keep a long established luncheon club open, and other smaller funding needed for similar work.

- Residents facing benefit cuts are now having to wait up

to five weeks for legal advice, which will force them to move out of Islington (15,000 residents could be affected by these benefit caps).

d) Other voluntary charitable groups who freely give their time and expertise to local communities are hit.

The meeting that passed this dog warden proposal should have held a 'named vote' of the councillors who voted to spend £240,000 for this purpose, so that there is a clear record of who exactly considered this proposal 'good value for money from public funds' and voted accordingly.

Helen Cagnoni
Clerkenwell '1 in a 1000' representative

Party policies on private transport (Cars must not be priced off roads, *Gazette Letters*, April 19). But I wonder whether he objects only to their short-term impact or whether he also disagrees with their long-term aims?

The root cause of the problem we face is car dependency, rather than car ownership. If we can find ways of cutting down the need to travel in the first place, then we are halfway towards solving the problem.

Ian Shacklock
Liberated former car owner
Monsell Road, N4

Health reforms MP is supporting damaging change

Defend the Whittington Hospital Coalition is deeply disturbed that the Liberal Democrat MP for Hornsey and Wood Green, Lynne Featherstone, has reiterated her full support for the Health and Social Care Act. This law has already led to massive privatisation, reductions in provision and loss and demotion in health jobs.

The Lib Dems refused to save our NHS from the government's damaging health reforms. Please refuse to vote for any of the coalition's representatives on May 3.

Jem Lindon
Defend the Whittington Hospital Coalition
Holloway Road, N7

Autism Back campaign to provide work

I want to encourage our MP to support the National Autistic Society's (NAS) Undiscovered Workforce campaign to help adults with autism into employment.

With the right support, people with autism can overcome the barriers to work that they often face.

Nerina Ince
Andover Road, N7

day-to-day monitoring of contracts and performance. Now that HfI has been taken back in-house, we'll find that it will be the same staff wasting our money. All the more reason for a thorough investigation to see where things went wrong.

Richard Rosser
Highbury New Park, N5

Tribunal How dare council challenge findings

Just what does the council's decision to challenge the findings of an independent government-funded tribunal say about their priorities regarding resident satisfaction, and who they in reality prefer to support – their contractors or their tenants?

Personally, I think it speaks for itself that they are openly prepared to question the merits of allowing the judgment of a tribunal to stand, as opposed to challenging, on behalf of their tenants, the much larger issue of contractors' charges.

Does this council seriously believe that members of an independent tribunal – who

are legally trained or highly qualified professionals in the building trade – are either totally incompetent or incapable of assessing the merits of this challenge impartially?

Given the blatant disregard for "value for money", "quality and necessity" and "good practice", as identified in the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal adjudication, I am, quite frankly, astonished that the council dares to appeal its findings.

Surely our councillors' time would be far better spent ensuring that million-pound contracts are always awarded on merit and provide true value for money rather than simply allowing their assigning to be little more than a matter of convenience?

Dr Brian Potter
Chairman, Federation of Islington Tenants Associations,
Chairman, Islington Leaseholders' Association

Motoring Wean drivers off car addiction

Michael Constable seems less than happy with Green

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