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It’s been a busy summer at Barnet Homes.

We’ve launched our extended emergency alarm service, Assist. We’ve completed a major improvement programme on a notorious block of bedsits at Philipson House, North Finchley. And, perhaps best of all, the long-awaited regeneration of Grahame Park has finally begun.

I’ve also thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to talk to other Barnet Homes residents at our various summer fun days. As ever, your comments – whether positive or negative – are extremely valuable as we look to continue to improve the services we offer you.

Finally, many of you will have seen the story earlier this summer about a fatal tower block fire in Southwark that claimed six people’s lives. We are determined to do all we can to prevent any repeat here in Barnet, and you all have a part to play.

Please take a few minutes to read the fire safety advice on page 7. Remember - it could help to save your life, and the lives of your family and neighbours.

Vi Britchfield,
Chair of Barnet Homes
Neighbours united!

Ian Baxter wanted to make his area a better place to live - so he asked his neighbours to join him.

He knew that creating a new residents’ group in Church End, Finchley, would give people a much more powerful voice and produce the results they all wanted for their estate.

And sure enough, within a few months he’s seen the improvements he was hoping for.

Ian says: “I started by door knocking and asking my neighbours if they were interested in forming a residents’ group. I got a positive response from many of them, so I organised a meeting last September at Cheshir Hall to form the Church End Residents’ Association.

“We’ve now got around 35 members and we’ve had a great start. We’ve been able to build better links with the police, local businesses and our local school and we’ve all benefited. Barnet Homes has also made a few improvements to help prevent vandalism, including cutting back overgrown shrubs and bushes. The estate’s looking very good.”

The residents’ association held their first fun day on the estate this July, with local pubs, army cadets, scouts, police and school children all involved in the entertainment.

Ian now produces a monthly newsletter to keep all residents up to date with what’s happening, and he hopes to receive formal recognition for the residents’ association soon from Barnet Homes. That would also lead to a grant to help with running costs.

Next up is organising a trip out for older residents living on the estate later this year.

“I’m really pleased with what’s been achieved so far,” Ian says. “The association’s looking to go from strength to strength.”

What’s good about having a residents’ association?

Elaine Krasniqi
(Pub landlady)

“An association brings the community together. We’re such a diverse bunch, it’s nice to get everyone together and get things done and also have lots of fun on the way!”

Peter Murray
(caretaker)

“Having the association is a good thing and I’m all for it - both as a Barnet Homes caretaker working here and as a resident myself. As a caretaker I’m now the first port of call for residents, so I can get things done swiftly for them.”

Melanie Turner
(resident)

“It’s good to get to know each other and discuss the good and the bad about living here. I have two children so it’s quite important for me to know people and that the area is safe for them.”

How to start a group

Starting a group is not as daunting as it may seem - and it can be fun.

Most groups start with a handful or interested people. The first step is to talk to your neighbours to find out the issues they have and what they think about setting up a residents’ group.

You can receive practical advice and support to get your group off the ground by calling Barnet Homes’ Neighbourhood Resident Involvement staff - Wendy Bohan on 020 8359 4860 or Deborah Beckford on 020 8359 5307.
I’m really, really happy. We’ve been working hard in this garden for the last ten years. Now the neighbours have started to join in too.

Looking for a lifeline?

Our former Lifeline alarm service has been relaunched and expanded under a new name – Assist.

The Assist service offers security and reassurance if you have an accident or could be at risk at home or at work. Our staff will send for the necessary help if you get into difficulty and talk to you until it arrives.

Assist includes a home alarm service, a telecare service, free home fire safety checks and a monitoring scheme for people who work alone in a potentially dangerous job.

To find out more, call 020 8359 4841, email assist@barnethomes.org, or visit our website www.barnethomes.org.

Training success

Almost 40 residents who took up Barnet Homes’ offer of free training have been rewarded for their efforts at a special awards ceremony.

The residents, who have completed qualifications in such diverse areas as project management, youth work and information technology, were presented with certificates by Barnet Homes Chair Vi Britchfield.

The ceremony took place at a Believe to Achieve event to direct residents to available jobs and training opportunities.

You can find out more about what’s on offer by calling Jacqui Jones on 020 8359 4777 or email Jacqui.jones@barnethomes.org.

Blooming best!

We are pleased to announce the winners of this year’s Finest Flowers competition.

Hundreds of Barnet Homes residents across the borough have made a huge effort to brighten up their neighbourhoods, but in the end we have to whittle the entries down to seven winners.

They are:
- Hamid Gordiz of Sheldon Court
- Geoff Bedingfield outstanding gardening award
- John Moore of Wolsley Grove
- Best front garden
- Thomasina Mitchell of Marsh Drive
- Best balcony / container display
- Ela Klein of Wimbush
- Best sheltered home garden
- Norman Arder and Donna Bennett of Alexandra Road
- Best communal garden
- Maria Valencis of Prospect Ring
- Best new gardener

The winners of each category will be presented with vouchers for garden centre goodies.

Mr Gordiz said: “I’m really really happy, we’ve been working hard in this garden for the last ten years. Now the neighbours have started to join in too.”

Extreme makeover!

A notoriously run-down block has been transformed into six modern and desirable flats in one of the most innovative projects undertaken by Barnet Homes.

Philipson House in North Finchley previously had poor living conditions and increasing amounts of antisocial behaviour.

But Barnet Homes has now spent £450k with its partner United House modernising the layout and, after just four months of work, the flats are now ready to let.
Two Barnet Homes’ residents have helped turn a neglected green space into a wildlife haven which everyone can enjoy.

Leo Smith and Jane Anderson were involved in an 11-year campaign to restore Long Lane Pasture in Finchley, including a fight to prevent it being sold for housing.

They have since helped to clear thick brambles and rubbish, planted trees and flower borders and created a new pond.

Jane said: “I enjoy coming to the pasture come rain or shine. There’s a feeling of doing something worthwhile and it’s lovely to see it transformed.”

The green space is open to the public between 10am and 5pm on Saturday and Sundays.

Footy fiesta!

Talented young footballers were taught to bend it like Beckham during a summer league on estates across Barnet.

The league began with seven weeks of coaching and match sessions, and culminated with the best teams taking part in a major tournament at Barnet Football Club.

The most talented individuals will now have the opportunity to take part in development courses run by Barnet FC. The scheme was also supported by Barnet Community Transport and Barnet Council.

You said, we did...

You said:
> You wanted us to improve bulky rubbish collections at Mount Pleasant to deter flytipping
> You wanted more recycling bins at Rolfe House

We did:
> We’ve changed the collection point to make it easier to dispose of bulky waste
> We’ve now arranged for more bins to be provided

Feeling the squeeze?

Are you a Barnet Homes tenant interested in buying a home on the open market? If so, we may be able to offer you a grant of up to £29,000!

The offer is open to any tenant with:
• No rent arrears or other debts to Barnet Homes or Barnet Council
• At least two bedrooms
• A home in good condition

You must be able to show that, with some help, you could afford to buy a home.

Interested? Phone us on 0800 389 5225.
6 Leaseholders Special

Feeling the squeeze?

A new loan scheme has been introduced to help leaseholders who may be having difficulties paying major works bills.

The discretionary loans are being offered to resident leaseholders who have been refused loans by two other lenders, and who can demonstrate the ability to repay the loan.

The introduction of the loans is part of Barnet Homes’ “Feeling the Squeeze?” campaign to help and support residents through the economic downturn.

Chair of Barnet Homes, Vi Britchfield, said: “The funding we’ve received from the government has given us a one-off opportunity to bring thousands of council homes up to Decent Homes standard.

“But as a leaseholder myself, I’m very aware that we’re presenting many leaseholders with large one-off bills for works, and that some of you are going to find it hard to pay.

“The new discretionary loans scheme is just one of the payment options we offer. I’d really encourage anyone who is having difficulties paying for major works to get in touch with us, and we’ll do whatever we can to help you.”

See the box on the right for more payment options.

Ways to pay

Discount option
If you pay bills for major works within 28 days, we will offer you a 2.5 per cent discount.

More time to pay
For major works of less than £3,000, we will give you up to 12 months to pay interest free. That extends to 24 months for major works costing more than £3,000.

Right to a Loan
If you’re within the first ten years of your lease, you could also be entitled to a Right to a Loan from Barnet Council. To find out more contact your Leasehold Housing Officer on 020 8359 4147.

Direct Debit
You can save £10 on your service charges by switching to direct debit, with a choice of paying on the 1st or 15th of each month. For a form call 020 8359 4147, email homeownership@barnethomes.org or download it from www.barnethomes.org.

Get advice
We can arrange free independent financial advice for you. Call Freephone 0800 3895225.

Step on the gas

Now is a good time to check if your annual gas service is due - before the cold weather arrives.

Every year people suffer or die from carbon monoxide poisoning as a result of gas appliances that haven’t been maintained properly.

Gas is called the silent killer because you cannot smell it, taste it or see it. So why risk it?

Barnet Homes advises all leaseholders to have their gas appliances and heating serviced regularly by a Gas Safe Register engineer (this replaces the previous CORGI gas registration.)

If you are a leaseholder who sublets your property you are legally required to ensure gas appliances receive a yearly safety check.

Village Heating Ltd (VHL), Barnet Homes’ gas contractor, offers leaseholders a competitive breakdown and servicing contract. Phone Freephone 08000 351 360 for details.

You can find out more by visiting www.gassaferegister.co.uk or call 0800 408 5500.

Election update

There have been no expressions of interest from leaseholders wishing to stand for election to our Board.

That means the current leaseholder director, Barnet Homes Chair Vi Britchfield, will remain in the role for a further three year term, subject to Board approval.
Get a free smoke alarm fitted by calling us on 020 8359 4841.

Join the fight against fire... Fires can kill.

In July this year a fire at a tower block in Camberwell, south London, claimed the lives of Dayana Francisquini and her young children, Thais and Filipe; Helen Udoaka and her three-week-old daughter Michelle; and 31-year-old Catherine Hickman.

At Barnet Homes we are determined to do all we can to prevent any repeat of this tragedy in our borough.

Please take the time to read this Fire Brigade safety advice. It could save your life, and the lives of your loved ones and neighbours.

Your top ten top must dos

If you remember nothing else – remember these!

• Fit smoke alarms and check they are an approved standard
• Don’t smoke in bed
• Keep matches safe
• Don’t sit too close to a fire
• Don’t overload electrical sockets
• Check everything is safe before you go to bed
• Switch off electric blankets when in bed
• Have electric blankets checked regularly
• Don’t overfill pans and deep fat fryers
• If the oil catches light – turn off the heat.

Escaping from fire

• Make an escape plan
• Keep keys to window locks by the windows
• Get everyone out as soon as possible
• Dial 999
• Crawl under smoke and fumes
• Block gaps around doors if trapped by fire.

If you live in a flat or maisonette please follow this extra advice:

• Flats and maisonettes are built to give you some protection from fire. Walls, floors and doors will hold back flame sand smoke for a time.
• If there is a fire elsewhere in the building you’re usually safer staying in your flat unless heat or smoke is affecting you
• If there is a fire in your flat, leave the building closing the door to your flat behind you
• If there is a lot of smoke, crawl along the floor where the air will be clearer
• If you live in a building with a lift, do not use it if there is a fire, go down the stairs instead
• Call 999 from any phone. Give them the address including the number of your flat, and tell them which floor the fire is on.

Remember

Communal staircases, corridors and balconies should be kept clear of all combustible material, such as prams, bicycles. Domestic rubbish should be removed immediately and not stored in communal areas.

Need more information?

A wide range of fire safety advice, including leaflets in other languages, can also be found at www.fireservice.co.uk/safety

What we’re doing

Barnet Homes has been carrying out fire risk assessments at blocks of flats since new regulations came into effect in 2006.

We’ve prioritised those blocks considered most at risk and we’ve completed risk assessment at all tower blocks, sheltered housing blocks and alarm-assisted blocks.

In light of the fire in Camberwell, we’re speeding up our assessments around all other blocks which we manage. All should be completed within a year.

Contact Barnet Homes

• To have a free smoke alarm fitted – phone 020 8359 4841
• To report damaged or open fire doors, or items stored in shared hallways and electrical intake cupboards - phone 0800 3895225
Residents at Grahame Park can now look forward to a brighter future for the estate.

**Grahame Park regen is go!**

Work has now started on building more than 300 new homes as part of the first stage of the £800million regeneration plans for the Grahame Park Estate.

The new houses and flats are being built on the land to the west of Grahame Park open space. More than 130 homes will be offered to tenants whose properties are due to be demolished in the first stage of the regeneration scheme.

Barnet Homes Chief Executive, Tracey Lees, said: “I am so pleased that the regeneration programme for Grahame Park is underway at last. The economic downturn dealt a huge blow to long-term improvement plans for our estates. “Residents at Grahame Park can now look forward to a brighter future for the estate, and I hope similar progress can now be made on our other regeneration estates.”

The Grahame Park regeneration is being led by Choices for Grahame Park, a subsidiary of Genesis Housing, in partnership with Barnet Council. Plans are for 3,000 new homes, along with parks, shops, a new library, health centre and community centre.

**Sprint sensations**

This was the scene at Grahame Park as more than 200 young athletes geared up to show off their sprinting skills.

The Street Athletics event saw youngsters compete in a series of 60m sprints down The Concourse, under the watchful eye of Olympic legends Linford Christie and Darren Campbell.

Winners of each range were invited to pit their talent against the best young sprinters in the country at national finals in Manchester.

**Picture perfect**

Young people from the West Hendon Estate honed their artistic talent by painting a mural more than twice the length of a London bus!

The children, aged between 9 and 15, brightened up their estate with a 64-foot mural depicting woodland scenes and famous London landmarks.

**Time to help out?**

Do you want to play a part in improving the quality of life for your neighbours? Or do you need a boost in trying to get back to full-time work?

Volunteers are needed to fill the role of reception assistant for the Grahame Park Community Development Group at the One Stop Shop in The Concourse.

The role involves overseeing general administration duties, such as distributing post, photocopying, filing and day to day reception management, and you can choose times to suit you.

Interested? Call Tim Blanc on 020 8359 4621 or email tim.blanc@barnethomes.org.
She cupped my face in her hands, gave me a kiss and said ‘thank you’.

Keeping the peace!

Have you got problems with a nuisance neighbour? Then Barnet Homes’ Antisocial Behaviour Team is there to help you. Charlotte Wilkins talks with one of the team about their day.

I come into work hoping that my diary will be as normal as possible, but it somehow never works out at that way. It sounds like a cliché, but no two days are alike. Our first priority is to ensure that we keep on top of our cases – each of us can have up to 50 cases at one time and we have to treat them all as matters of importance.

Someone in our team is on duty between 9am and 5pm, so residents always have someone to speak to if they need help. Throughout the day we receive constant phone calls and visits. The job can sometimes be stressful but it’s also very rewarding, because we do get successes.

An appointment following a complaint about a neighbour’s noisy dog. Luckily, we’ve managed to get funding to employ a dog trainer, whom people can contact for advice, so I’ve given the residents the trainer’s details. We’re constantly looking at how we can encourage neighbours to solve their problems between themselves, rather than cases going to court.

I’ve organised a meeting between two of our residents having problems over noise. We call this restorative justice, and it’s a great way of bringing two neighbours into the same room to talk about their problems and come to an agreement. Sometimes there are really easy solutions, like agreeing that people won’t put their washing machine on overnight – it’s just a case of rebuilding relations between the neighbours and helping them to understand each other’s issues.

After grabbing a quick (and late!) lunch, I start the afternoon dealing with some more cases of noise nuisance. These form the majority of our complaints. Again we try to look at underlying problems. Is it really about a noise, or is there another issue involved? There are always some cases where we have to look at options like Acceptable Behaviour Contracts or court injunctions, but we tend to think of cases that go to court as failures, not successes.

After organising some more appointments with residents for the following week, I make a quick visit to see a resident. Visiting people’s homes is really important to our day to day work, though it can sometimes be intimidating. If we’re visiting a suspected perpetrator, then we’ll always go in twos. There have been times when I’ve been in a home and had to report domestic violence to the police or animal welfare issues to the RSPCA.

I always find it hard to switch off, and often I have evening meetings, which makes it pretty much impossible. Tonight I’ve got a meeting with environmental health officers at the council, next week we’ll meet with the local police and sometimes we’ll still be liaising with residents until late. But it’s the work with residents that gives me the greatest satisfaction. I had a case when an elderly resident had suffered for many years from antisocial behaviour and I’d encouraged her to give evidence in court. The case was successful.

How to report antisocial behaviour

Whatever your concern about antisocial behaviour, please contact the police in the first instance. Where appropriate, they will refer the case to Barnet Homes.

If it is an emergency where someone’s life could be in danger, please call 999 immediately.

Otherwise, you should call your local police Safer Neighbourhood Team. Phone 0300 123 1212 for details or visit www.met.police.uk/teams/barnet.

To get in touch with Barnet Homes’ Antisocial Behaviour Team call freephone 0800 3895225 and ask to speak to a member of the team.

You can also report antisocial behaviour anonymously, call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.
I've recently retired and would like to move out of London, but I'm not sure what my options are – do you have any advice?

The best option for you is the Seaside & Country Homes scheme, which offers people living in council or housing association properties an opportunity to move out of London. It's ideal for residents of retirement age, as the properties are specifically designed for older people and are best for those wanting a less hectic pace of life.

There are lots of places to choose from, including Devon, Cornwall, Norfolk, Suffolk and the Isle of Wight, and there are approximately 3,500 one and two-bedroom flats available, which can come with both front and back gardens and lifts.

The lead applicant for each household must be at least 60 years of age and must be a tenant of a social housing landlord in London. You will need to fill out an application form and get your landlord to sign your nomination slip.

If you are interested in the scheme you can call Seaside & Country Homes on 08450 212020 or visit the website www.housingmoves.org.

Don’t get us all down in the dumps. If you’ve got bulky items you need to get rid of, call us on 0800 3895225 to arrange a collection.

save up to £600 with a free eaga ShowerSmart...

- The eaga ShowerSmart saves up to £20 per year* on both gas and metered water bills, which equates to £600 over the product’s lifetime.

- 1 eaga ShowerSmart will typically save more than 21,000 litres of water/year for the average family of 4 and cut carbon emissions by more than 1 tonne of CO₂ over its lifetime.

- 15-year manufacturer’s guarantee.

- Easy-self installation.

- Suitable for use with non-electric mixer showers or bath/shower mixer taps.

- It regulates the flow rate of the shower, saving both water and the associated energy with heating hot water.

APPLY NOW for your FREE eaga ShowerSmart.

There are two ways to claim your free eaga ShowerSmart:

1. Go to www.eaga.com/uu and complete the form
2. Call freephone 0800 953 0033 quoting offer code H2

Maximum 1 eaga ShowerSmart per household during the period 1 January 2008 to 31 March 2011. We are unable to supply an eaga ShowerSmart if you have already received one within this period. Allow 42 days for delivery. Offer available to Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) residents only and is subject to availability. *based on a 2-person household. Source: The Building Research Establishment.
Get advice on how to save energy – and money. Call the Energy Savings Trust on Freephone 0800 512 012.

Why not get switched on to energy efficiency and save yourself money?!

Barnet Homes is seeking to create greener homes for the future through our Decent Homes programme. We’re making thousands of properties more energy efficient by providing more effective insulation.

But we also need your help in the fight to tackle climate change.

**Ten top tips** you can follow today and make a difference

- Washing clothes at 30°C uses around 40 per cent less energy than higher temperatures. Use the economy button if your machine has one.
- Unplugging chargers after your device has charged saves a lot of energy. In the UK, 95 per cent of the energy used by mobile phone chargers is wasted.
- Close your curtains at dusk to stop heat escaping through the windows and check for draughts around windows and doors. Use draft excluders if necessary.
- Dripping hot water taps waste enough hot water to fill half a bath in a week, so make sure you fix them.
- Only boil as much water as you need in your kettle, but make sure the element is covered by water.
- Using energy saving lightbulbs that last up to 10 times longer than ordinary bulbs can save around £45 over their lifetime. The Energy Saving Trust can tell you who is giving these away free locally.
- Switching off your computer at night rather than leaving it on saves £96 a year and stops around half a tonne of unnecessary CO₂. Also switching off your monitor when you take a break saves lots of energy.

Why not try the Energy Saving Trust’s ‘carbon cutter’ on line to check your carbon footprint?

Go on line at [www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/calculator/start](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/calculator/start)

It’s also worth comparing prices for your gas and electricity suppliers to ensure you are on the best deal. New providers will organise a switch if you want to. Most also offer help for customers on low incomes who are struggling to pay their bills.

For more advice and information [www.energysavingtrust.org.uk](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk)

Energy Saving Trust Advice Centre - Freephone 0800 512 012
Hunt for local heroes

Does your neighbour go the extra mile to help others? Have you been a dazzled by a young person's talent.

We are on the hunt for worthy winners of our 2009 Residents Awards.

Last year Barnet Homes residents June Gulle, Marge Lacey and Janet Sackey were all rewarded for their dedication to their community.

We have five categories this year:
• Community leader of the year
• Resident / community group of the year
• Volunteer youth worker
• Young person
• Most creative idea

To enter, simply fill out the form on the address slip of this edition of athome and return it to us at the Freepost address provided.

If you want an extra form, call Tim Blanc on 020 8359 4821 or email tim.blanc@barnethomes.org.

Estate ideas

Do you have a bright idea for how we can make environmental improvements to your block or estate?

Last year Barnet Homes spent £1.2million on making neighbourhoods cleaner and greener, and we’re now planning similar work for 2010-11.

Send you ideas to Veronica Lavin, 11th Floor Barnet House, 1255 High Road, London N20 0EJ.

Alternatively, email veronica.lavin@barnethomes.org or call 020 8359 5644.

Get online

Do you want to see all of your Barnet Homes accounts and transactions in one handy place at the click of a button?

We are setting up a new online service, which will give you information about rent and garage accounts, your current rent balance, recent transaction, and any outstanding repairs.

If you are interested in making use of this, please email housingdirect@barnethomes.org.

Bedazzled or bored stupid?

What do you think of this edition of athome? Did it make you want to nod off or was the information helpful?

Each copy of athome is reviewed by a residents’ panel before it lands on your doormat. But we need more members to make sure that our newsletter is helpful, relevant and easy to read for all of our residents.

As a member of our Editorial Board, you can also have your say on other information provided by Barnet Homes – our leaflets, letters and our website.

If you think you’d have something to contribute, call Jonathan Lawn on 020 8359 4911 or email jonathan.lawn@barnethomes.org.

Diary dates for Barnet Homes

Board Meetings

The Board
Monday 21 September
Monday 16 November

Business and Resources Sub-group
Thursday 3 September
Thursday 5 November

Standards and Asset Management Sub-group
Tuesday 20 October

Involvement Hub & surgery
Wednesday 18 November
from 6pm. Cheshir hall, Foster Street, Hendon NW4 2AA
All residents welcome – contact 020 8359 4821

Barnet Homes’ AGM at Hendon Hall Hotel
On Wednesday 11 November

To attend phone Sarah Gillett on 020 8359 4804
Keeping the *peace!*

and afterwards she cupped my face in her hands, gave me a kiss and said ‘thank you’. I think if you can make a small difference to someone else’s life, then you can make a big difference to your own.