

Hackney Independent

www.hackneyindependent.org

Spring 2005 Haggerston & Hoxton Edition

RIPPED OFF BY HACKNEY COUNCIL

Council tax UP
Parking charges UP
Council rents UP
Service charges UP



Hackney Independent's Peter Sutton says Labour should be ashamed of rent and service charge rises for such a lousy service.

Hackney Council are bringing in increases across the board in April. Rents are going up above inflation, along with increases to service charges, council tax and parking charges. Terry Edwards of the Tenants' Convention is right to call the rent rises "daylight robbery."

Hackney Independent oppose the rises. Labour councillors should be ashamed to push through rent and service charge increases when they provide such a lousy service. And when they try to say it is the government's fault, lets remember that Labour runs both the council and the government. These are Labour's increases.

Of course our leading councillors don't actually live on council estates. To them council housing is a problem best solved by selling it to housing associations, or shifting the management to private companies. They also think that increases don't matter because most of us are on benefits. Well a lot of us are - but these increases don't help anyone trying to get off benefits and into work, while others are low waged

or on a small pension and will struggle to pay the extra.

The Tories are saying they oppose the rent increases - but we know that Tory councils are putting their rents up and that the last Tory government was just as opposed to council housing as this Labour government.

It should be quite simple. We pay our rents and service charges to Hackney Council. In return they have to manage and maintain our estates. If we don't pay them they come after us pretty quick. We should go after them just as quick for not fulfilling their legal duties as our landlord.

Better still, if we could organise that no-one paid the extra rent and service charge, then they could not take us all to court. We could force them to

withdraw the increases. We know we can't achieve this yet, but if we can build up a stronger tenant and leaseholder movement we could achieve this in future years.

In many ways the real issue is about what they do with the money. Our middle class councillors have their own priorities - like the Town Hall square, promoting trendy bars and restaurants and pushing through plans for developing private flats. Leading councillors also pay themselves £700 a week for just being on the council. If the extra rent and service charges went on cleaning up our estates and carrying out our repairs then they may have a case. But we know we won't see any improvements. That will only happen when we get shot of this bunch of Labour councillors and build up the power of tenants and leaseholders.

GENERAL ELECTION 2005 NOTHING TO VOTE FOR

In this year's general election we will yet again see the main political parties pretending that they are interested in us. Politicians we haven't seen since the last election will come round stuffing leaflets through our doors making promises they won't keep. They lie to us during elections and ignore us in between. Most of us won't vote, and whoever wins it won't make much difference to us.

Fifty years ago general elections were fought on who could build the most council housing. Now the issue won't even come up as the main parties chase the middle class vote. It is in comfortable "middle England" where the election will be won and lost, and that's who Labour, Tories and Lib Dems are trying to represent.

Labour take it for granted that they will win here, and the other parties only make a token effort. Labour have replaced Brian Sedgemore with Islington-based Meg

Hillier, who was as useless on Islington Council as she was at pretending to represent Hackney on the Greater London Authority for four years up to 2004.

Just because most of us won't vote it doesn't mean that none of us are interested in politics. We're not interested in parliament, where no-one even tries to speak for us. But we are interested in politics if this means what happens on our estates, in our schools, or to our wages, pensions or benefits. So although we can't change anything by voting in this general election, we can all do something else more important on voting day. What about joining the estate's tenant association, setting up a parent and toddler club, getting a pensioner group going, helping run your community hall or even just taking to your neighbours about how to improve your community? Tell the canvassers from the main parties you have nothing to vote for in this election, you're getting involved in community politics instead.

INDEPENDENT KIDS' CINEMA

Presents



GARFIELD THE MOVIE

Film + Drink + Crisps 50p

Two Showings:

HAGGERSTON
Wednesday 30th March
10.30am
Goldsmiths Community Centre
 Goldsmiths Row E2

HOXTON
Thursday 31st March
3.00pm
Geffrye Estate Community Centre
 Falkirk Street N1

HOXTON INDEPENDENT?

Do you want an independent force in Hoxton or should we leave it to the Labour Party?

Hackney Independent has been going out across Shoreditch since 1999. In that time we have:

- opposed Council plans to cut, close or sell-off our essential services and facilities
- played a part in some victories like getting rid of ITNET
- supported the parents, kids and staff at Apples and Pears adventure playground who fought off council plans to build flats on their site

We have had some defeats like the closure of Laburnum school. Other campaigns, like to re-open Haggerston Pool are still going on. We have established the Independent Kids Cinema and run benefits and repairs advice surgeries. And we have marked out as being different from any other political organisation in two important ways:

- we keep going every month of the year and don't just turn up when there is an election

- we go door to door asking your opinions rather than try to tell you what you should think.

In 2002 we stood for election in Haggerston Ward and got 610 votes - just 90 short of beating Labour. We have built on that in Haggerston with advice surgeries, kids film shows, campaigns for Laburnum School and against privatising estate management. We have support and contacts on every estate in the Ward. While we have some support in Hoxton we are writing this appeal to Hoxton tenants and leaseholders to come forward if you want to help build a stronger independent force in Hoxton.

Should Hoxton rely on the Labour Party? Or should we build an independent force to campaign for repairs to our estates, facilities for our young people and to look at community solutions to the problems of anti-social behaviour?

Hoxton, it's up to you. Get in touch.

Problems with Repairs, Benefits or Debts?

Hackney Independent Advice Surgery

Thursday 7th April
6.00-7.30pm
Geffrye Estate Community Centre



Hackney Independent member helping Hoxton tenants with repair problems at the last advice surgery.

IS ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR A PROBLEM?

Members of Hackney Independent went out on four very cold nights in February to knock on doors on the Geffrye and Harman Street estates in Hoxton. Our aim was to find out residents' views about anti-social behaviour where they live. We spoke to people from 102 homes - about a quarter of the whole area. We found out that the main issues were:

- Some Hackney College students sitting on the stairs and causing problems - especially near Falkirk Street
- The entry doors are badly maintained by the Council
- Estate lighting needs to be improved
- Some blocks have a problem with people urinating on the stairs and it not being cleaned up often enough.

So what can we do about anti-social behaviour? Well, while the Labour and Tory parties keep promising to solve the problem by having more police and to crack down on the youth crime, they never make anything actually improve on the ground. Part of the problem is that the people who actually live on council estates don't have any political influence. If there was a problem in a middle class area the police would clamp down on it hard, while in Shoreditch they don't even respond to all 999 calls.

Our way of dealing with this is to find out what people in our area think. As one Stanway Court resident told Hackney Independent's Peter Sutton "you're the first person in 26 years to ask me what it is like to live on this estate." Our next step is to work with residents on these estates to push the Council into meeting its responsibilities to clean the stairs, improve the lighting and maintain the entry doors. And we will try to reduce the problems caused by college students. A special 'Stanway Independent' will be delivered on the estate with more details. If you would like to see it, or you would like to work with us on a campaign on your estate, call Carl Taylor on 020 7684 1743.

We are told that things are getting better by papers like 'Hackney Today' and 'In Shoreditch'.

THEY SAY the council is now improving. **THEY SAY** millions of pounds are being spent on this area. **THEY SAY** the Council is empowering the community and you should get involved.

WE SAY nothing has changed for the better. The council is as badly run as ever. They do what they want and never improve our lives. Any new money is just for the short term to replace what the Council used to pay for directly. They only look out for the interests of middle class settlers - getting private flats built and supporting their new bars and restaurants.

Hackney Independent wants to drive the Labour Party out of Haggerston and Hoxton - they don't represent working class interests. We want to block the development of private flats. We want to defend what we have got from being cut back or sold off. We are trying to build an organisation that can take on and beat Labour in elections, play a part in community campaigns and try to do practical things like advice sessions and run kids' films shows. You can help.

To get in touch phone Carl Taylor on 020 7684 1743, write to us at Hackney Independent, PO Box 47000, London E8 4WW, or email us at info@hackneyindependent.org.

News Updates

Battle on Broadway

If you have walked through Broadway Market on a Saturday recently you will have seen the changes. On the plus side it is good to see the market open and busy again after being shut for so long. The bad news is that the market is mostly aimed at the trendy rich young people moving into the new private flats that are being developed in the area. Who else are the £3 loaves and £5 pork pies for? We are not just guessing at this. We stopped 52 market goers one Saturday and found out what they were buying, how much they were spending, how much they earned and how long they had lived in the area. The result? Average wage of over £1000 a week, lived in the area for just 9 months and spending over £30 in the market.

Now Hackney Independent's Carl Taylor has written to the Market Traders to demand that they try to attract stalls that can provide affordable goods we need like kids clothes, toiletries and food at fair prices. They have agreed to meet him as we go to press and we will report more in the next Hackney Independent.

Hackney Homes Ltd.

Next stop for council housing privatisation plans. Remember the glossy newsletters the Council sent you saying you would get a new kitchen and bathroom if they set up an ALMO (Arms Length Management Organisation)? They followed that up with a 'test of opinion' late last year where the Council put forward different privatising choices for council housing. It was clear, as Hackney Independent stated at the time, that Hackney Council has just one aim - to set up their ALMO. Now despite only getting the support of 4,000 out of 33,000 tenants and leaseholders, Labour's housing chief Jamie Carswell claims he has an overwhelming mandate to set up an ALMO, due to be called Hackney Homes Ltd. Some tenant leaders in Shoreditch are trying to make the problem even worse by setting up a Shoreditch ALMO as well as one for the rest of Hackney. This would mean even more red tape, more highly paid managers and would lead to Hackney Council housing being even more of a mess than it already is. We already have different private managers running the neighbourhoods and different private firms cleaning some estates and carrying out repairs. If you put two ALMOs into the mix then the buck would stop nowhere. Our view is that Hackney Council should take responsibility for running council housing itself and spend our rent and service charges on repairing and cleaning our estates.

Haggerston Academy?

Are the Council trying to push Haggerston School into becoming a privately-sponsored Academy? When plans were leaked, the Council and their Learning Trust company denied it - but can we trust them? This Labour Council want to shift everything else out from under their control, so why not Haggerston School? They don't want responsibility for anything from schools, to council housing to sports centres. Haggerston parents, pupils and staff are ready to fight to block any plans for an Academy and the Hackney Independent will give them our full support.

Haggerston West and Kingsland

Tenants and leaseholders on the Haggerston West and Kingsland estates have been let down by Hackney Council for more than ten years now. Throughout this time there have been many plans drawn up but no work carried out. So while many other estates in the area have had entry doors and new windows without being sold-off, all Haggerston West and Kingsland have had is letters saying that new schemes are being drawn up. A small group of dedicated tenant reps have kept working for many years to try to get money put into their estates. Now London & Quadrant housing association have plans to take over. But they keep being put back as builders pull out or as their money is not enough. Hackney Independent spoke to 178 tenants and leaseholders on the two estates. Although views on going over to the housing association are mixed, what was very clear was that only 14 of the people we spoke to felt that they had a good idea of what is going on - less than one in ten. Ten years on, most people in the dark and no money spent. Haggerston West and Kingsland residents have been let down by Hackney Council. They deserve better.