

Hackney Independent



Newsletter of the Hackney Independent Working Class Association - Spring 2002

COUNCILLORS “HAVEN’T GOT A CLUE”

81% say they don’t speak for us

Two surveys were carried out late last year - one by the Council and one by the IWCA. But they couldn’t have been more different. While the Council hired top pollsters MORI at a cost of £150,000, volunteers carried out the IWCA’s survey at a cost of less than £100 - money we raised ourselves. And while we print our results in full on page 2 of this paper, delivered free to every home in the area, who has seen the Council’s results?

Why did the Council need to carry out their survey? It’s because they haven’t got a clue how the rest of us are living. “We never see our councillors on our estates anyway,” said IWCA Action Team member Carl Taylor, “so now they are using our money to pay other

people to come round and do their job for them - to find out information that most people could tell them for nothing.”

The IWCA criticised the survey in a Hackney Gazette article headed “Survey Branded ‘Waste of Money’ on 1st November. IWCA Action Team Member Peter Sutton was quoted as saying “While they’re slashing the budgets of voluntary groups and closing down our public facilities, they obviously think they can waste thousands of pounds on this type of PR exercise.”

The IWCA spoke to over 1000 people on 17 estates across Haggerston and Hoxton. The results are very clear. Over 80% say that the Council is doing a bad job, and



Doing something about it - IWCA action team. (l-r) Carl Taylor, Nusret Sen & Peter Sutton



Run down and neglected - councillors don’t have a clue what’s going on.

again over 80% say that the big parties at the Town Hall - Labour, Lib Dems and the Tories - don’t represent them.

But don’t expect Labour to change as a result of either survey. It is very clear on a national level that Labour only listens to big business - particularly those businesses that fund the Labour Party. Who does Labour listen to at a local level? Do they listen to tenant associations, parents, youth workers? Not any more. Now they listen to the developers of luxury flats and trendy wine bars, businessmen who want to take over the running of Council services and the regeneration agencies who are working to force local people out of the area.

GOT A PROBLEM? GET IN TOUCH!

Contact Hackney IWCA on 7684 1743 or write to Box 48, 136 Kingsland High Street, London, E8 2NS.

The IWCA website is regularly updated with news and reports at www.hackneyiwca.fsnet.co.uk and you can send us an email on hiwca@iwca.fsnet.co.uk

Hackney Independent is put together by local volunteers from the Independent Working Class Association (IWCA).

The IWCA is a community organisation that works with and as part of Hackney’s working class majority to ensure that their interests are put first in the borough.

We believe that the working class should be in control of decision making in our communities, not Regeneration agencies or the Labour, Lib Dem and Tory parties on the council. These groups all have one thing in common. They represent middle class interests and have consistently let us down. The IWCA wants to ensure Hackney gets councillors that properly represent the community and more power is given to local organisations, not middle class professionals from outside the area.

Hackney Independent Bagimsiz Isçi Sinifi Kurumunda (Independent Working Class Association, IWCA) çalışan lokal gönüllüler tarafından hazırlanmıştır.

Bagimsiz Isçi Sinifi Kurumu (IWCA) toplum organizasyonudur. Bagimsiz Isçi Sinifi Kurumu Hackneyde bulunan çoğunlukta Isçi sinifinin bir parçası olan ve onlarla çalışıp isteklerine öncelik sağlamaktır.

Biz inanıyoruz ki kararlar Belediyede olan Regeneration acenteleri. Labour, Liberal Demokrat veya Tory partileri kontrolunda değil Isçi Sinifi kontrolunda olmalı. Bu grupların ortak bir yanları var, hepsi Orta Sinifların isteklerini temsil ediyor ve sürekli olarak bizleri hayal kırıklığına uğratiyorlar.

Bagimsiz Isçi Sinifi Kurumu (IWCA) istiyor ki Hackney bölgesinde toplumu doğru temsil edecek meclis üyeleri olsun ve güç bölgeden olmayan Orta Sinif profesyonellere değil Lokal Kurumlara verilmeli

Your Point Of View

Over a period of six months Hackney IWCA has been carrying out a massive survey across 17 different estates, speaking to over 1000 people in the process. We wanted to find out what the people of Hoxton and Haggerston really thought about the problems in our area. Along the way we heard a lot of things we knew already - that hardly anyone has any faith in the council to sort out day to day problems, that crime and anti-social behaviour are a constant worry for most of us - but a lot of things we didn't know - problems faced by tenants that we could do something about and issues that were particular to certain estates. Below we analyse the results and to the right we comment on them.

We asked people to tell us what concerned them about their estate and the local area. They were free to tell us anything but we also provided the following list from which they could pick three issues:

Crime and anti-social behaviour, lack of community facilities, lack of affordable housing, repairs and cleaning, schools and nurseries, Health Service, jobs for local people and people being priced out of the area.

A lot of people commented that all the issues were important. But the results were still very clear. **Crime and anti-social behaviour was picked by 70% of people and repairs and cleaning by 56%. These were followed by the lack of community facilities at 35% and local people being priced out of the area at 24%. None of the options got less than 15%.**



Derelict flats on Haggerston West. Issues around housing featured high on your list of priorities

We then asked a straight question - "do you think Hackney Council do a good job?" We got a straight answer. **81% said no.**

We asked if people thought their views were being heard by the Labour, Lib Dem and Tory councillors in the Town Hall. We got the same answer. **81% said no.**

When asked if they would consider voting for candidates opposed to the main political parties **84% of those surveyed said yes.**

We asked how often residents received the official council publication, Hackney Today. It is meant to be delivered twice a month, but **51% said they only got it very occasionally or never at all.**

For those who read Hackney Today we asked do you believe what you read in it? Only 24% believe most of what they read in it, with 25% not believing any of it. 51% only believe some of what the Council tell them in the paper.

IWCA Comment on the survey results **OUR ISSUES ARE YOUR ISSUES**

For the last four editions of the Independent we have concentrated on four issues: Crime and anti-social behaviour, cleaning and repairs, lack of community facilities and local people being priced out of the area. These have been our issues. We thought we were right to focus on them. Now we have the proof that they are your concerns too.

That's not to say that we will ignore schools and jobs. But the IWCA will focus on your top four issues for the next year.

HACKNEY COUNCIL FAIL US

More than eight out of ten people think that the Council is doing a bad job. Anyone who did the survey can tell you that most of the 19% who said they were doing a good job, it was because they had examples of some dedicated Council staff providing a good service against all odds. Very few were thinking of £3000 a week Council boss Max Caller and his overpaid management team.

HACKNEY TODAY

Hackney Today is the Council's PR newspaper. You are meant to get it through your door twice a month. There's a good chance that you don't. But someone is paid to deliver it, and a council a manager is paid to ensure that it is delivered. Typical Hackney Council, though - no-one checks. It has taken volunteers from the IWCA to prove that there are problems in the distribution.

Even those who do get Hackney Today don't believe much of what they read in it. Have a look at a recent copy again. How come it is all good news? Anyone who knows what it is like to live in Hackney knows that most things connected with the Council are bad news. Yet we have to pay for the Council to produce a newspaper that tells us that everything is alright! No wonder the majority of people don't believe everything they read in it.

UNACCOUNTABLE COUNCILLORS

The vast majority thought that Labour, Lib Dem and Tory councillors did not represent them. This is no surprise. These councillors seem to spend their time in the Town Hall arguing over which cuts to make. None of them are seen visiting their wards between elections. Certainly none of them are interested in representing the working class majority in the area.

The biggest joke of all is they say we are apathetic when we don't vote! In a way it is surprising that as many as 19% think that the main political parties are representing them. Many of these are people who have always voted Labour and have strong traditional loyalties to the party. You just have to ask yourself - is Labour still loyal to you?



Burnt out and dumped on Kingsland Estate. Anti-social behaviour and crime topped the list in nearly all areas.

We were very encouraged to find that 84% would consider voting for alternative candidates in May's council elections. The IWCA has floated the idea of standing candidates for a few years now. Look out for an announcement in the near future on this.

Councillors versus the people

Editorial

Who do Hackney's councillors represent? Certainly not the people of Haggerston and Hoxton!

It doesn't matter whether they are Labour, Lib Dem or Tory. Their priorities are things like 'regenerating' the Town Hall Square, re-organising its internal bureaucracy and encouraging the night-time economy, but do nothing to address the concerns of the majority of the population who have to contend with crime, terrible housing and a lack of community facilities. Hackney Council prides itself on 'leading the way' in Urban Regeneration. But while our councillors push through policies that bring in new yuppie flats, expensive bars and clubs and sell off council properties to the highest bidder, they have voted to close Haggerston Pool, the Apples and Pears play area, and a whole range of smaller but important groups and social clubs. We have hardly seen our councillors for the last four years. As one resident put it during our survey 'we only ever see them before an election an even then only if we're lucky!' Where were they when we needed them? How can they ever ask for our support again?

Crime in Hackney

As Hackney Council shut down the Apples & Pears play area, the parents and children of Pearson Street are right to worry about the social consequences of yet another property sell-off. Councillors and regeneration professionals assure us that crime prevention is one of their main priorities, but axing valuable community services like playgrounds, nurseries and youth clubs means even less for local children to do. It seems Hackney Council would rather spend money turning the area into an open prison, installing CCTV on every corner rather than on providing our kids with resources and opportunities.

Crime and anti-social behaviour is the single biggest issue in the area and turning kids out onto the street with nothing to do is unlikely to address its causes. However, the biggest crime of all in Hackney is that carried out by the Council and their estate agents, selling off every last local service in the name of short-term financial interest. Hackney Council is convinced that everything will be all right when the middle-class professionals move in creating, in their words, 'more balanced communities'. But the people of Haggerston and Hoxton will not take the closures lying down and are fighting to stop the authorities taking all our social provisions away. This is because, unlike Hackney Council, they understand the real meaning of community.

dumped cars - how the iwca took action



Back in the last edition of the Hackney Independent we raised the issue of abandoned cars on the estates of the borough. Since then the whole problem has become national news, with the government ordering a "crackdown" on the problem. But – surprise surprise – if you live in a working class area of Hackney your chances of seeing a crackdown on dumped cars is virtually zero. Do you think that in more middle class areas of Stoke Newington for example, burnt out cars would stay for months by the side of the road? The council has cut the free service that used to take old cars away. This means that people just dump them instead, which in the long run must cost the council more! But a larger part of the problem is down to political will.

As the council appeared to be taking no notice of tenants' concerns, Hackney IWCA launched its own campaign to get action. When dumped cars were reported to us by tenants we phoned or faxed the council directly and posted the details on our website along with a picture (see www.hackneyiwca.fsnet.co.uk for more details) and put a poster on the car to let local people know it had been reported.

In a press release to announce the start of our campaign, IWCA spokesperson Carl Taylor said that "Hackney Council have the power to remove abandoned cars within a week of them being reported but in most cases are failing to act within a month or even longer. On the Kingsland Estate

in Haggerston, out of 5 cars reported to the council by the IWCA only one has been removed and more are starting to pile up. Abandoned cars are another symptom of the running down of working class areas. As far as the main political parties on the council are concerned, people who live in these areas are second class citizens so their complaints aren't worth listening to".

Along with many of the people we interviewed as part of our Your Point of View survey, the IWCA campaign was supported by Chair of Kingsland Estate Tenants Association, Anna-Maria Mari who commented "If this was a middle class area, the council would have sorted the problem out; these abandoned cars are dangerous and can make the whole area look like a dumping ground. We have reported these cars to the council ourselves but nothing has been done."

what you can do:

- Report abandoned cars to the Council.
- Ring your estate office if they are on an estate, or 8356 4811 if they are on a public road.
- Ring the IWCA on 7684 1743 and tell us that you have reported the car. Give us some details like registration number, make, colour and where it is.

We will put a poster on it saying that it has been reported and put it on our website. If you want a supply of posters we can drop them round to you

"Direct democracy - give the people a chance to have their say"



Nusret Sen is a well-known community worker in Haggerston and is involved with the IWCA. Nusret spoke to the Hackney Independent.

What do you think that the main issues in Haggerston are?

I would say jobs, housing, leisure and health.

Most people pick out housing and maybe jobs. Why do you say leisure and health as well?

They are all linked together. Everyone knows that the Tories deliberately ran down council housing to promote private landlords. There has been no improvement under Labour.

The Council aren't doing most repairs, and this is part of a deliberate policy to destroy council housing. In the end people can afford to get out do so. And the aim is that those who are left will be so desperate they will be prepared to support privatisation.

But leisure is important too. The youth clubs are being cut or close down, the leisure facilities are being run down. And that goes hand-in-hand with Income Support being chopped so people have plenty of time and can't afford to use what leisure facilities we have left. This leads to an increase in crime, but what did they expect? It leads to an increase in teenage pregnancies - but what did they expect?

And of course if you have no job, poor housing and have no access to leisure facilities then your health is going to suffer. These are all linked. And in this country tens of thousands of old people die every Winter because they cannot afford to heat their homes.

What do you think of Haggerston Councillors, Nicholson and Young?

Even the best councillor can do little to bring about real changes because the government controls the Council and the money is restricted by central government. A good councillor would expose this and make people aware of it. Young and Nicholson aren't good councillors.

As if big business was not making enough money, now they want to make even more money by providing public services - like paying housing benefit and sweeping our streets. Haggerston Labour Councillors Young and Nicholson have supported privatisation policies like these.

When the Tories were in power, Labour used to say that when we had a Labour government in things would only get better. Well Labour's been in for 5 years now and things are no better. Labour is meant to be for the working class, but it is run by the City of London.

You are critical of our councillors. But what should a councillor do?

A councillor should work for the community as a whole, but should put themselves at the service of the community, tenant and trade union activists. Council papers should be available to everyone. We should put them on the internet, in the Hackney Independent, everywhere across the ward - with an explanation of what it means and all the possible outcomes. Councillors should be seeking everyone's opinions of what positions they should be taking, and give people a chance to have their say - at public meetings or through the internet. I call this direct democracy.



A new member reports on recent activities.

Over the last few months we have been busy conducting our survey (see page 2). When visiting estates we have heard about many of the issues faced by local tenants. On several occasions we have worked with residents to try to find solutions to their problems.

ACTON ESTATE PETITION

On Acton Estate we noticed that one block had no communal lights and its intercom and buzzer system had broken down. There was also a deep hole directly outside one of the main doors. Tenants told us that it had been like that for two weeks and they had reported the situation to the Council.

A fortnight later we heard that Hackney had still not repaired the block. In fact they had made matters worse by removing several huge wooden panels in the stairwell, leaving electrical cables exposed and propping them where they could fall onto someone!

We organised a petition signed by 18 out of 20 tenants in the block and alerted the Hackney Gazette, who sent a photographer down to cover the story. When we announced that we would go with the tenants to the Estate Committee about the issue the lights were fixed the same day. The IWCA will keep working with the tenants until the other repairs are also made.



the protest at Scriven Court

FELLOWS COURT

In Fellows Court we found soapy water pouring from a pipe directly onto a walkway under the block. Angry tenants had been told by the Council that the problem was caused by rainwater, even when it happened on dry days! One resident noticed that the flooding only happened when she emptied her sink or used her washing machine but none of the council plumbers would repair it. The IWCA contacted the Council and sent the story into the Gazette. Eventually the Council fixed the problem - after 3 months.



bring your brolly - leaking water at Fellows Court

IWCA SURGERY

Would Haggerston Councillor Guy Nicholson put up with walking up three flights of stairs in the pitch black for six weeks like the residents on Acton Estate? Hackney Tenants need to know their rights and work together to demand the service they are entitled to. The IWCA hold regular surgeries on different estates, advising on how to best deal with housing benefits and repairs issues. In October we held a surgery on the York Row and were then invited to the York Row Estate Committee to give further advice on housing benefit.

If you would like support in raising issues on your estate then get in touch. The IWCA hold a monthly meeting, open to all, where we discuss forthcoming activities and events. Please ring for details.

APPLES AND PEARS - cutbacks bite

"The library has been closed, the swimming pool has been closed and now you want to close Apples and Pears. It is unbelievable. Where do the young people go?" Parent Katharine Purdy asked council officers this question at a public meeting last month. The council officers couldn't answer.



Apples and Pears - where will young people go if it's closed down?

The Apples & Pears Adventure Playground in Pearson Street has been running since 1978. Before that there was a Fellows Court playscheme funded by the GLC. And now Hackney Council want to close it down and sell off the land.

Hackney Council first drew up plans to sell off over half the land without even realising that there was an adventure playground there. That's despite the fact that most of the funding comes from the borough. It says a lot about the senior council officers that they didn't know about this important community facility and did not even bother to check. The Council plan to sell off over half the land

– the half with the huts and all the play equipment. "They haven't offered us any other site or to move the huts for us, said Jenny Lord, Chair of the Management Committee. "But even if they did we would not be able to carry on because the site would be too small, and we couldn't move these huts. We get 200 kids a day in here at the busiest times."

The Council have been promising to renew Apples & Pears' lease since 1995 but have done nothing about it. The playground's management committee, made up of parents and other local volunteers, has had to take the council to court to force them to renew it. Because of this legal action the Council has had to pull the land from auction, giving Apples & Pears more time to campaign to stay open.

Apples & Pears is on the boundary of two wards, represented by two Tory and two Labour councillors. What support have they had from their elected representatives? "Only one councillor - David Young - is taking any interest at all," said Jenny Lord, who lives on Fellows Court. "He has visited us once."

In the last three months the IWCA has surveyed over 300 households on the estates immediately around Pearson Street – York Row, Fellows Court and Kingsland estate. Anti-social behaviour and the lack of facilities were among people's main concerns. There are already a lot of problems caused by young people in the area who have time on their hands and not much to do. We asked parent Sue Camiller what closing Apples & Pears will mean for the area. "The effects will be massive. We don't let our kids go to Haggerston Park

with all the drunks and druggies in there. The kids are safe here. Some of the kids don't have the best time at home, but the staff work hard to make all the kids feel welcome. My son says it would break his heart if it was sold."

Anyone who wants to support Apples & Pears can come in to the centre, or write in with a letter of support. Anyone who asks for your vote in the council elections in May should be asked if they are going to support Apples & Pears. **"We're not giving up," says Jenny Lord, "We're going to fight all the way to keep Apples and Pears open."**



During term time Apples & Pears is open Tuesday to Friday from 3.30 – 6.00pm and from 9.30 to 4pm on Saturdays. During school holidays it's open from 9.30 to 4.30pm. For more details drop in during these hours or call Ann Small on 7729 6062.

Doreen Bullock interview

Doreen Bullock is a very well-known community leader and the Chair of St Mary's Tenant and Resident Association (TRA), Haggerston. Doreen has lived in Haggerston for 17 years and has been chair of the TRA since it started 3 years ago. In that time the TRA has secured real improvements to the estate that would otherwise never have been done by the Council, such as central heating, and more recently new roofing, windows and security doors. Doreen spoke to the IWCA's Carl Taylor.

Carl: What do you think about what's happening to Haggerston Pool?

Doreen: The pool should be reopened. The squatters should be evicted. They are holding regular raves in the building and keeping surrounding tenants awake at nights. Who knows what damage they are causing?

The pool was closed to prop up the funding of the development of Clissold Park Leisure Centre. New Labour had no intention of reopening the pool, whatever they may have said publicly. They gave no warning of the closure to users, including the local schools.

Carl: What do you think of Haggerston Labour Councillor Guy Nicholson?

Doreen: Councillor Nicholson doesn't live in this area. He lives in the area served by the new Clissold leisure development. He doesn't give a damn about his constituents in Haggerston.

I had my first meeting with Nicholson in two years just recently. There must be an election coming up. He has never responded to our phone calls. Why is he not working closer with the New Deal to get

the pool reopened? I am sure New Labour has plans to sell off the pool to solve their debt problems – at our expense.

Carl: Apart from Haggerston Pool, the other major community facility is Apples & Pears. Now the Council wants to sell that off.

Doreen: Apples & Pears should be kept open. There is nowhere for kids on St Mary's or Fellows to play. Apples & Pears are right to raise concerns about an increase in youth street crime in this area. There is Haggerston Park, but it has no park rangers or supervision and there are no organised facilities for our children.

Carl: Lastly, what would you say the main issues were on St Mary's estate?

Doreen: People are concerned about anti-social behaviour. The council's proposed warden scheme will, in my opinion, provoke rather than solve trouble, because they have no authority.



get involved!

Do you want to get involved and make a difference to your community? The IWCA is a community-based organisation that campaigns for working class rule in working class areas. We believe that Hackney's working class majority is not represented by the main political parties so we should work together to make a difference ourselves. Much of the work we do depends on the support we get from people that want to make a difference to their block, their estate, their whole area - and that means we need your help.

There are different ways to help. Can you deliver the next edition of the Hackney Independent to your block or street? Better still could you be a local contact for the IWCA? This would mean phoning in any information about what is happening on your estate so that we can either cover it in the Independent or campaign for things to be done about it. As a contact you might also get our posters put up on local noticeboards or ask shops to put them up.

If you can attend occasional meetings to help plan campaigns and agree what should go in the paper then you would be very welcome.

If you want to help, but are not sure what you can do then you can give us a ring. If you are not sure what the IWCA is about you can also give us a call. If you want we can send someone around to have a chat, or we can meet in your local cafe or pub. Get in touch and we can begin to change things around here.

Write to New Contacts, Hackney IWCA, Box 48, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS. or leave a message on 7684 1743 and we will get back to you. Please repeat your phone number.