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Private landlords face threat of clampdown

LANDLORDS in Seven Sisters Road and Finsbury Park could be forced to take part in a new licensing system aimed at making sure private rental-market properties are up to scratch, writes Samantha Booth.

They will have to pay for a

licence if they have homes shared by three or more people, with requirements to provide details of tenancy agreements, property layouts and gas, electrical and fire safety.

The policy pledge is part of a manifesto released by the ruling Labour group on Sunday,

ahead of the May 3 council elections. It comes amid concern over a lack of well-maintained properties on the private market.

If landlords don't comply, enforcement action could be taken.

A licensing system already

covers 3,500 private renters in Caledonian Road and Holloway Road. It was introduced in 2015 after the council warned that it had found there were too many poorly-managed properties in

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Brother tells inquest how 'perilous' stress brought on seizures

SHOCKING DEATH OF SICK MAN WHO LOST HIS BENEFITS

by EMILY FINCH

A MAN suffering from epilepsy, liver and lung disease who had trouble walking saw his disability benefits withdrawn up until a few months before his death.

Stephen Braithwaite, 59, died at his Canonbury home after taking an accidental overdose of painkillers to cope with broken ribs sustained during a suspected seizure.

His family say he should not have been deemed "fit to work" by the Department for Work and Pensions.

This week, Islington South Labour MP Emily Thornberry, who has campaigned against the government's welfare reforms, condemned the situation Mr Braithwaite found himself in and warned of the "large holes in Britain's safety net".

Mr Braithwaite was an important figure in Islington's squatting scene in the late 1970s helping house dozens of people.

His younger brother Matthew, 54, told an inquest at St Pancras Coroner's Court on Monday that his brother had fallen into "major" rent arrears at his council-owned home following the loss of disability benefits before his death in November.

He told the inquest: "The stress could bring on his seizures, as corroborated by his doctor. It was a most perilous situation [he was in]. The

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DAD STABBING

Pair are guilty of murder

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School on 'rat run' asks for a crossing

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LOST HAT PLEA

Gift from woman's late fiancé

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Easter break fun activities

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Lunch with Kate & Wills! See page 2



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'Stress put my brother in a perilous situation'

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stress was palpable." Mr Braithwaite had collapsed after suffering a seizure at Jobcentre Plus, in Barnsbury Road, during his weekly "signing on" in August 2016 to receive Job Seeker's Allowance, which was less than £70 a week.

The inquest heard how Mr Braithwaite suffered from liver disease, epilepsy (following a severe bleed in the brain after a fall in 2012), high blood pressure, mobility issues and chronic lung disease. He was a recovering drug addict and relied on a walking stick, needing to take frequent breaks when walking.

His employment and support allowance (ESA), a disability benefit he had received for three years, was stopped two months before he collapsed at the Jobcentre and was only partially reinstated a few months before his death. He had previously worked as an antiques trader in Camden Passage and as a chef in the East End.

Ms Thornberry, whose



Stephen Braithwaite, died after seizure and fall. Left, brothers Matthew and Chris

constituency covers the Jobcentre where Mr Braithwaite collapsed, said: "This is a shocking incident. A mark of a civilised country is how it treats those who are down on their luck. The safety net in Britain has large holes in it through which too many Islington people fall. And it gets worse month after month.

"If people are too sick to work, they should be

supported and treated with dignity, not forced to look for a job."

Matthew Braithwaite told the *Tribune* after the inquest: "He was told that he had lost his disability benefits on a Saturday afternoon, which stunned him. He was desperately unwell.

"At the Jobcentre they told him they didn't care about doctor's certificates and he could still work.

"One of workers told him: 'Unless you've got limbs falling off, and you're in this office, we think you're fit for work.'"

Matthew added: "It was all very cynical and callous. The Jobcentre made it so difficult for people to appeal. You have to get it done within a month, which was very overwhelming. I helped him with the appeal and managed to complete it within the month, but they said nothing had changed."

He said his brother was

found fit to work by "healthcare professionals" at the Jobcentre, contracted private workers who decide whether individuals are entitled to disability benefits.

"They are not state registered nurses. How can they decide if people can work? None of them could help him after his seizure and another person signing on had to put him in the recovery position before the paramedics arrived," said Matthew.

The inquest heard how Stephen was found dou-

bled in pain by his brother after he fell during another suspected seizure at his home in Englefield Road on November 6.

He refused to go to hospital and instead took a series of painkillers. Although Matthew checked on his brother in the night, he found him unresponsive in the morning. Paramedics declared Mr Braithwaite dead at the scene.

A pathology report read out at the inquest said Mr Braithwaite had lethal levels of painkillers in his blood alongside a non-

lethal level of heroin. He was also found to have broken ribs from his fall.

Coroner Edwin Bucket gave the cause of death as "drug related" and said Mr Braithwaite had not intended to take his life.

A Department for Work and Pensions spokesman said: "Our thoughts are with Mr Braithwaite's family. When making a decision for ESA we consider all of the evidence that's available at the time, including any information provided by the individual and their GP or medical specialist."

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Are you flush? Why not fork out extra council tax?

LABOUR plans to offer the chance for wealthier residents to pay an optional extra council tax to help boost council funds if they regain control of the Town Hall in May, writes *Samantha Booth*.

Current council leader Richard Watts insisted the Fair Islington Fund would not be used to replace council services, but could pay for extra projects.

"People completely understand we've had

£200m cut a year by the Tory government and that, while I think we are doing a good job of maintaining our basic services, and quite a lot more, there's not a lot of extra money on top of that knocking around for lots of new stuff," he said.

Conversations are continuing about how it would work, but the money could fund preventative measures to help young people and the elderly. Town Hall finance chief Councillor Andy

Hull said: "The fundamental problem is that when it comes to all of our social problems we need to bale out the bath

and turn off the tap, and it's very hard to do both when you've got 70 per cent less money than you had a decade ago."

Royal service for lunch!

Page 1 picture

A COMMUNITY centre in Finsbury cooked up a special international lunch last week – with a royal touch.

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge joined the cooking group to help put the finishing touches to dishes for the Commonwealth Big Lunch. It was the Duchess of Cambridge's last royal engagement before going

on maternity leave with the couple's third child, due in April.

Michael Ryan, St Luke's chief executive officer, said: "We are thrilled that Their Royal Highnesses helped St Luke's with our Commonwealth Big Lunch.

"We host a daily lunch for older people, an annual Big Lunch in June and celebrate our diverse cultures. Our Commonwealth Big Lunch was an extra special event for all here."

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