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Owner beats off fox attacking Chihuahua

A PERSONAL trainer fought off a fox "with her bare hands" when her pet Chihuahua was attacked on Friday evening, writes *Frederica Miller*.

Marie Wilson had to rescue her beloved Brown from the jaws of the fox, which grabbed him in her Canonbury back

garden. "I had to physically beat the fox up with my bare hands until it let go of my Chihuahua from its jaws," Ms Wilson said.

"It had sunk its teeth into my Chihuahua's neck. My leg was bleeding. I have been cut and shaken up by this."

This is the second time this year Ms Wilson has had to battle off foxes attacking her pets. She saved her other Chihuahua, Madison, from one in March.

That attack caused Madison, who needed emergency surgery, to lose several teeth.

Ms Wilson added: "Two fox attacks on both my dogs in less than five months is unacceptable. I should be able to live my life with my dogs safely in both my front and back garden."

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Pledge to fit replacements raises concern about earlier safety checks

U-TURN ON FIRE DOOR RISKS AT TOWER BLOCK

by EMILY FINCH

IN a climbdown this week the Town Hall promised to fit new fire doors at a Clerkenwell tower block despite a recent report stating they were "low risk".

The change of heart has raised concerns about the validity of the borough's fire risk assessments.

In a letter in the *Tribune* today (Friday), Islington housing chief Diarmaid Ward says: "We agree fire doors at Michael Cliffe House need replacing, and are addressing this as a priority."

He confirmed that fire doors separating the corridor from the stairwell in the communal areas of the council-owned flats would be replaced.

But a fire risk assessment carried out by a council inspector in July last year said the fire doors were "low risk" and did not recommend replacing them. Instead, the inspector said "the fire doors within the common and landlord areas [are] suitable and sufficient".

Residents of the 24-storey block in Skinner Street said they first told Islington Council in 2010 – a year after the disastrous Lakanal House fire in Camberwell – that the block's 1960s fire doors did not fully close. Richard

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'Being 100 is exciting!' See page 5

'SECRET' HOMES

Housing system in court

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'Guildford Four' jail letters to be a play

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Old pie and mash shop set to close

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Mural of Corbyn on side of pub

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Sour taste Pie and mash shop set to close

ONE of the capital's oldest pie and mash shops is set to close due to rising business rates, writes *Aleesha Hansel*.

M.Manze, in Chapel Market, Angel, has been serving the traditional London grub since 1911. The shop's manager for the past seven years, who did not want to be named, confirmed that business rates were the cause of the closure.

Last night (Thursday) customers were swapping stories about the shop, which has catered for birthdays, weddings and funerals during its 106-year history.

Lifelong customer Len Hayes, 64, a postman who used to live nearby in Wynford Road, said: "I remember there being sawdust on the floor. It's an institution."

It is still unknown when the doors will shut for good. Some businesses in Islington have had their rates hiked by 45 per cent, the third biggest increase in the country.



Customers at M.Manze pie and mash shop

Court told that social housing was allocated outside bidding process Homes are given 'in secret'



Rebekah Carrier

A HIGH Court judge has ordered the Town Hall to change its social housing allocation rules after it was revealed more than 120 homes were given directly to homeless households last year – outside of the regular bidding process.

The practice, in use since 2005, was stopped in May after a High Court judge ruled it was unlaw-

by KOOS COUVÉE

ful. Mr Justice Baker told Islington Council to change the scheme in a judicial review case brought by a single mother-of-three fleeing domestic violence who challenged the decision to deny her a council home.

Families on Islington's housing register, which

totals 19,000 households, can bid for social rented homes through Home Connections, a "choice-based lettings scheme" run by the Town Hall. Those with the greatest housing need, which is measured in points, get allocated homes first.

The threshold above which a household can bid for housing is 120 points. But homeless families, such as the claimant in this case, generally only get awarded 110 points, meaning most homeless people do not stand a chance of ever getting a council home.

However, during the two-day hearing in February, Karen Lucas, Islington's head of housing needs, admitted in a witness statement that in 2015/16 around a third of the 1,172 total allocations were given directly to families who had bid but were unsuccessful, outside of the scheme. Only 32 allocations to homeless applicants were the result of the usual bidding process.

The claimant's solicitor, Rebekah Carrier, from Finsbury Park-based law firm Hopkin Murray Beskine, accused the Town Hall of operating a "secret" scheme.

"We see desperate people who've been through often really traumatic events leading to homelessness and families housed in Islington in grossly unsuitable accommodation," Ms Carrier said.

"It's really shocking that despite repeated questions and challenges Islington have kept secret for years what's really going on in the allocation of social housing.

"This is now explained. It has meant that nobody really has any idea of what their rehousing prospects are and that Islington seem to have been deciding who gets a home without reference to any rules. We need to know what they're going to do now."

In his judgment, Mr Justice Baker said: "There is nothing in the scheme which sets out the criteria which the defendant uses to make direct offers, so as to enable an applicant [...] both to make a realistic application to be dealt with under this system, and to know whether they are likely to succeed."

The Town Hall has been forced into a rethink, and will most likely need to start awarding homeless families more points, or change the threshold.

Diarmaid Ward, Islington's housing chief, said: "You need to have discretion to give out a direct offer. Our allocation scheme works reasonably well in the circumstances – it's a difficult time in social housing. I don't think there's any secrecy about it."

"In this case the High Court did not say we can't give out direct offers, it just says we need to have a much clearer policy about that. There are lessons to be learned from that."

"We need to look at this very carefully and one of the things we need to look at is the points threshold."

Clr Ward added: "We are in a very difficult situation in this borough because demand [for social housing] greatly exceeds supply."

U-turn over fire doors at tower

from page 1

Larcombe, who lives on the 17th floor and is chairman of Finsbury Estate Tenants' and Residents' Association, said he no longer felt confident about council assessments. The fire-resistant doors at the entrance to individual flats also needed to be replaced, he added.

In a letter in the *Tribune* last week, Mr Larcombe said: "They [the current communal fire doors] would offer minimal smoke protection in the event of evacuation via the staircases as they are around 50 years old and have large gaps, cracked glass or doors that do not close, in addition to falling short of current standards of fire door design."

Of the fire inspection undertaken in July last year, Councillor Ward said: "We've got every confidence in our fire safety officers."

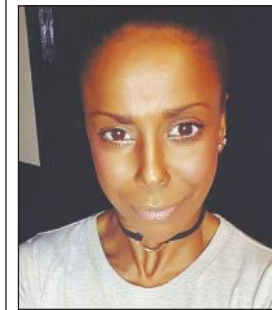
He added that the council owed it to residents to ensure their safety and would now carry out an audit.

During a fractious meeting with Town Hall chiefs and residents of high-rise buildings in Finsbury and Clerkenwell on Tuesday, Cllr Ward defended the delay in having all the cladding removed from Braithwaite House.

Independent tests of cladding at the Bunhill block, fitted as part of a 1998 refurbishment, confirmed the presence of aluminium composite material (ACM) last month. Grenfell Tower, the block of flats in North Kensington where at least 80 people died in a fire last month, had aluminium panels in its cladding.

Clr Ward said the Town Hall's fire safety procedures are examined by an independent body.

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Marie Wilson and her pet Chihuahuas



Dog attacked by fox

from page 1

An Islington Council spokesman said: "We understand how upsetting attacks on pets by foxes can be, and sympathise with Ms Wilson."

"We hope her dog makes a full recovery.

Unfortunately, under existing controls, the council has no remit to regulate local fox populations. We'd suggest Ms Wilson contacts the Fox Project, which provides helpful practical advice on deterring the animals."

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