

Ham & High

The quality paper for Crouch End & Muswell Hill

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Thursday September 26, 2013



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Repairs staff claim £3.7m in bonuses

'Staff suspended' after investigation launched into homes budget

EXCLUSIVE by Flora Drury

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An investigation is underway at Homes for Haringey (HfH) after it was revealed repairs staff had claimed more than £3.7million in bonuses in less than two years.

One employee working in the council's social housing arm's repairs department claimed a bonus of £54,292.70 for work carried out between April 2012 and March 2013, on top of a basic salary of somewhere between £25,970 and £28,068 per year, figures obtained by the *Broadway* show.

During the last financial year, repairs staff claimed £2,626,534.57 – a year in which Haringey repairs service (HRS) overspent on its budget by £1.536million.

In the six months the scheme was in place during 2011/12, staff claimed just £545,165.24, while from April to July this year staff claimed £537,717.70.

"Several staff" have now been suspended, pending the outcome of the investigation into the "level of earnings for some operatives".

Struggling

One employee, who did not want to be named, said: "What they have had to do [to counteract the overspend] is change the way working is done, and innocent people have lost their jobs for it. "That's what's not nice. I wouldn't want to lose my job."

The bonus system was introduced by HfH – the council's social housing arm – in October 2011 "to improve productivity,

quality and residents' satisfaction with repairs".

It is not known how much HfH thought it would be paying out when it brought it in.

An HfH spokesman said the overspend during 2012/13 would "not impact on the repairs service Homes for Haringey offers tenants and leaseholders".

They added: "During 2012/13, we carried out more than 53,000 repairs on behalf of our tenants and this did lead to an overspend on the repairs budget in 2012/13.

"We have now launched an improvement project – overseen by the HfH board and a recently appointed a new senior manager for repairs – that is helping us to drive down costs while continuing to improve customer satisfaction."

But Cllr Richard Wilson, housing spokesman for Haringey's Liberal Democrat opposition, said it was imperative an investigation got to the bottom of what had happened and ensure there has been no fraud.

"I am very concerned that bonuses paid to repairs staff have soared to more than £2million – whilst at the same time many local council tenants and leaseholders are tightening their belts and struggling to make ends meet," he said.

"I have received many complaints from residents about housing repairs not being done promptly or correctly so I am very surprised that such high bonuses have been paid.

"This is public money that should have gone on housing services for local people."



Family steps back in time

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Food festival to tempt tastebuds

Tempt your tastebuds with some truly delicious treats this October when a new kind of food festival arrives in Crouch End.

The Crouch End Digital Food Festival begins next week, showcasing the best of the areas great produce, as well as its wonderful cafes and restaurants.

Bringing together what are arguably Crouch Enders two greatest loves – food and social media – the month-long event promises to be a huge hit.

■ To find out more about the festival, turn to page 11.



■ Helen Jones of the Crouch End Project with Hot Pepper Jelly's Kirstie and Ellen Fraser