



Barnet Law Service under pressure

By Cathy Young

“The sort of problems which our clients brought us, mainly concerning welfare benefits, debt and housing, will not go away just because we have closed down,” says David Miller, secretary of the East Finchley Advice Service (EFAS), which was forced to close following the withdrawal of funding by Barnet Council.

Ironically, it was a report commissioned by Barnet Council in 1999 that highlighted the need in the borough for specialist legal advice for local people without the means to pay for it. Barnet Law Service (BLS) was a direct result of this report.

Staffed with solicitors, a barrister and experienced caseworkers, it initially took referrals from any local advice agency, including EFAS, national charities, MPs or social workers. However, welfare benefits casework is now accessible only by referral from the Barnet Citizen’s Advice Bureau.

Legal aid cuts

BLS currently has funding for some employment and immigration law cases but after April 2013, it will no longer be able to take on any new legally aided cases as most employment law and immigration law will be moved “out of scope” of legal aid under the terms of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act.

Marilyn Sparrow, executive director of BLS is very concerned. “The closure of EFAS meant another gap in the provision of advice in the borough. Meanwhile the demand

grows due to problems such as debt or homelessness increasing with the recession and with major changes to welfare benefits on the horizon. Also, the provision of advice will reduce much further once the cuts to legal aid kick in from next April.”

Support for a vital service

The two organisations had worked closely together and so the trustees of EFAS thought it was appropriate to donate their remaining funds, £3,000, to BLS.

“We worked with BLS for a long time and referred many cases to them; all of the cases were handled in a highly professional and caring manner,” explained David Miller.

When asked about the future, Marilyn Sparrow felt it was a gloomy picture but remained determined to provide help to the local community,

“We are very successful in what we do, with over 90% of the cases we take on successful at court or tribunal. We want to be able to continue this help so I would be very grateful if anyone can help us access grants and charitable donations.”

Contact marilyn@barnet-law.org.uk if you can offer help in obtaining funding.



Cherry Tree Road residents clean up

By Jacky Wood

Cherry Tree Road, N2 is squeaky clean after a leaf and litter blitz by residents who signed up to Barnet’s ‘Adopt-a-Street’ project. A band of volunteers aged from three to 73 braved the cold to wield an impressive array of tools, all donated by the council (who promise that the ‘regular’ cleaning service will still continue). Favourite with the kids was the litter-picker-upper, which can deliver quite a nip to an unwary backside. But a bin of winter grit was the most welcome item, and if adjacent streets sign up to the project we might just get our cars out this winter.

Is it safe to clear pavements yourself?

By Daphne Chamberlain

Some people are still hesitant about clearing snow and ice from the pavements outside their homes. The fear persists that they could be sued if someone had an accident there. The January 2011 newsletter of the Muswell Hill and Fortis Green Association carried this advice from its ‘legal eagle’ Peter Thompson.

“Most of the law regarding liability for personal injuries requires proof of fault and, most usually, negligence. There is nothing wrong with clearing snow off a footpath: it is a decent, neighbourly thing to do. A pedestrian who slipped on the cleared footway would not normally have a case.

“But there might be liability if the householder chose to clear the snow by pouring hot

water on it, thereby turning the cleared path into an icy slide. This would be a negligent, not to say silly way of clearing the snow and exposing pedestrians to risk that was not there before.

“Otherwise I adopt the general line that Government agencies are putting out: that wherever snow-clearing would benefit the public the citizen should not withhold his (or her) shovel for fear of being sued.”

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