

## HIGH-FLYING SEND-OFF



JUMPING JOY: Sixth formers from Francis Holland School with Kirsty Gallagher (back row, far right).

**GIRLS** at a Regent's Park secondary school gave their teacher a high-flying send off before she went to Africa this month.

Kirsty Gallagher, a PE teacher at the private Francis Holland girl's school, Clarence Gate, is preparing to leave for a sabbatical to teach at St Amedeus school in Tanzania.

Her fearless students showed their support for her mission with a fundraising bungee jump last Saturday

for her new place of employment.

Ms Gallagher said: "None of our sixth formers had bungee jumped before but they all loved it. It was really nerve-wracking but amazingly exciting at the same time. Knowing we were doing it for such a worthwhile cause, really helped to focus the mind."

A group of sixth formers from the school also visited Tanzania in December 2008 to assist with the painting

and decorating of classrooms.

Headteacher Vivienne Durham said: "The sponsorship of St Amedeus has been important to the whole school.

"We are all delighted that this opportunity has arisen to create an even stronger bond with the teachers and pupils in Tanzania. Ms Gallagher will provide valuable insights for us via her blog on the educational experiences in Tanzania."

# Crackdown on illegal sublets is needed now

Sanchez Manning

OPPOSITION councillors have praised the government for cracking down on illegal subletting – while blaming Westminster Council for failing to take action.

Currently, subletting scams are considered to be a civil matter and are only punishable with a fine.

But this week housing minister John Healey unveiled plans to make this type of fraud a criminal offence.

Leader of the local Labour group Paul Dimoldenberg said this tougher approach is desperately needed in Westminster, where unlawful subletting is rife as the high prices mean tenancy cheats can charge for rents.

On average, the rent for a three-bedroom council house in the borough is £114 a week but the market rent for the same or similar property can be as much as £530 a week, netting the sub-letter as much as £21,600 a year.

## Labour praises tough approach and exposes council indifference

But Cllr Dimoldenberg said in contrast to the government the borough's Tory-run council has done little to deal with such swindles – despite this practice leading to already scarce social housing being taken up by fraudsters.

A freedom of information request submitted by his party showed that City Hall bosses have brought cases against just 19 illegally sub-let council homes since 2005.

Cllr Dimoldenberg said: "With over 3,000 families on the waiting list and over 1,400 families waiting for a transfer to larger accommodation, illegal subletting is creating real misery for local residents in housing need, while allowing unscrupulous tenants to rake in thousands of pounds a year in unearned and untaxed income.

"We don't think the council is taking this issue seriously enough because very little action has been taken against illegal subletting.

"So we strongly support John Healey's proposals."

In December, the government started offering £500 rewards to anyone reporting a tenancy fraud.

Mr Healey has now also given councils and housing associations 27,000 leads to potential cheats in

their area uncovered by the Audit Commission. In addition, tenancy fraud investigators could be given increased powers allowing them to access utility companies' and social services' records

"By unlawfully subletting these properties for a profit they deprive families of the homes they need," said Mr Healey.

Westminster Council has defended its record saying that since December 2009 they have investigated 34 illegal subletting cases – around two a week.

City West Homes, which is responsible for tracking down tenancy cheats, said it is planning to double the number of homes it checks over the next few weeks.

From April 1 Westminster Council said it is also going to have a dedicated social housing fraud investigator.

Steve Moore, the council's deputy director of housing, said: "Any suggestions that we are not doing enough to crackdown on tenants who are subletting their flats are totally incorrect.

"We urge any residents who suspect any unlawful activity to report it immediately in complete confidence to the council's fraud hotline on 0800 028 9888."

## The good, the PAD and the ugly truth

A ST MARY'S nurse has swapped the bedside for the political benches to raise awareness of a little known condition that can lead to leg amputations.

Vascular nurse specialist Louise Allen spent a day testing MPs' blood pressure in the House of Commons to highlight risk of peripheral arterial disease (PAD).

The disease – or hardening of the arteries in the legs – sees 5,000 people lose a leg every year in England and Wales, and can lead to heart attacks and stroke.

Ms Allen said: "PAD is common in people over the age of 55, but compared to heart disease, is relatively

unknown by the public. Going to the Commons was a great opportunity to highlight the disease and demonstrate how a simple test can detect it."

MPs who took the test had a blood pressure reading from both their arm and ankle.

A reading that is lower in the ankle than the arm is a good indication of blood flow problems, which could mean someone is suffering from PAD.

Symptoms of the disease include pains in the leg muscles – which can eventually lead to gangrene. The Commons visit was part of the first Vascular Disease Awareness Week being spearheaded by the Circulation Foundation.



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