



Your independent community newspaper

WALTHAM FOREST ECHO

Free

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Renegade Urban Winery in Walthamstow threw a bash for the Blackhorse Beer Mile Christmas Party in December, which saw a whole host of breweries in the area open their doors for a night of merriment
Credit James Sinclair-Smith/Mance Communications

Council secures £72m from government funding review

by Marco Marcelline

Waltham Forest Council will receive a funding boost of £72million over the next three years, after the Labour government revealed its long-awaited local government settlement plan.

The multi-million pound cash

injection comes as Waltham Forest and other London boroughs have long complained of a real-terms loss in funding for years under outdated funding formula that does not take into account local housing costs.

Under the government's Fair Funding Allocation, Waltham Forest's core spending power is set

to rise to £378.7m by 2028/29, an increase of 23.5% from 2024/25.

Council leader Grace Williams welcomed the "first multi-year settlement in a decade", stating: "This means we will be able to make our resources go further and support more residents in need of help. It is also a positive that the deprivation measure used

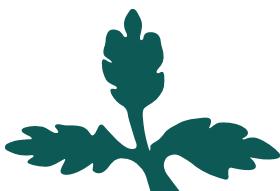
in the funding formula includes housing costs, which is so crucial for areas like ours."

Ahead of the funding announcement, the council had petitioned the government for more resources, warning that previously revealed plans would have left the town hall at risk of losing £9.5m per year.

In a residents' newsletter last month, Cllr Williams pointed to the borough receiving less money than neighbouring local authorities, including Hackney which has a public health budget more than double Waltham Forest's, despite having an almost

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NEWS



FELLOWSHIP IS LIFE

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Published on 29/12/25

'Endless traffic' slowing down London's buses

by Kumail Jaffer,
Local Democracy Reporter

Slower bus speeds are sparking a dramatic decline in ridership in London which will have a knock-on effect on fare revenue and the mayor's transport goals, the London Assembly has been told.

Average bus speeds on the capital's streets in 2024/25 were just 9.17mph – down from 10.27mph four years ago, according to data obtained by City Hall.

In October 2025 – the latest month for which data was available – the mean speed of a London bus was just 9.06mph. Meanwhile, passenger numbers fell for the first time since the pandemic last year, from 1.869 billion to 1.842 billion.

On Tuesday, 9th December, the London Assembly's transport committee heard that the "endless traffic" bus drivers are forced to navigate has seen commuters look to alternative transport methods.

Some boroughs have it worse than others, with average



speeds of under 7mph seen in the City of London, Camden and Westminster.

Meanwhile, the highest average speeds were seen in the outer boroughs of Bexley, Hillingdon and Havering, all of which were over 11mph.

TfL have pledged to implement their 'Bus Action Plan' which they say will result in quicker passenger journeys.

This includes the creation of 25km of new bus lanes by this month, 1,900 traffic signals that prioritise buses and making 85km of existing bus lanes

operational 24/7.

However, they were warned that recent moves towards promoting active travel had inhibited buses from carrying out their duty at speed.

Kevan Stagg, chair of the Unite London and Eastern Passenger Committee, said: "There's been a lot of own goals. You're looking for space for pedestrians, so we've narrowed roads. Cyclists – once again we've narrowed it. Now, quite often if you're behind a push bike, you can't overtake it as a bus driver because there just isn't enough room."

Continued from Page 1

identical population.

Cllr Williams has routinely raised the "unsustainable" financial plight the borough faces due to spiraling social care and temporary housing costs. The council overspent its budget last year by £24m.

Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service in November 2025, she painted a bleak financial forecast, stating the town hall could request exceptional financial support (EFS) from the government by the end of 2027.

She said: "Our core spending power has decreased by over 10% since 2010/11, when adjusted for inflation.

"At the same time, the demand for the services we provide has spiralled. There has been an 80% increase in demand for temporary accommodation over the last two years alone, and we are caring for more adults with social care needs than ever before."

She added: "The fact that a well-run council like Waltham Forest is even considering an extreme move [like EFS] shows how serious the problem facing the local government sector is. This is a direct result of 15 years of inadequate funding."

While the financial picture may be helped by the funding announcement, the council's social care and housing responsibilities are still set to cause significant pressure.

Cllr Williams stated to the *Echo*: "We will do everything we can to fulfil both our moral mission and our financial duty to residents. We are working hard to balance our budget and secure our borough's future – including seeking extra support from government, changing how we work to be more efficient, and putting a rigorous savings programme in place. But we will always be open and honest with residents – the financial challenge we face is still substantial."

Announcing the Fair Funding Allocation, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Steve Reed said: "This is a chance to turn the page on a decade of cuts, and for local leaders to invest in getting back what has been lost – to bring back libraries, youth services, clean streets, and community hubs."

"We're making sure every community has the funding they need to succeed."

Council approves series of hikes to fees and fines

by Sebastian Mann, Local Democracy Reporter

Waltham Forest Council has approved a series of cost hikes ahead of the annual budget.

The changes reach far and wide, ranging from increases in fines, the cost of running a market stall, and parking.

The new programme of fees and charges was backed by Labour councillors at a full council meeting on Thursday, 11th December.

Waltham Forest Town Hall
Credit Wikicommons



Overall, it is expected to increase the council's annual income by £1.5million, bringing it to £51.3m.

Few hikes will directly affect residents' day-to-day lives, and there has been no indication of whether council tax will climb by the typical 4.99%.

The bulk of the council's new income will be through a 5.6% increase to parking fees, which it says will net £1,136,500. Currently, motorists pay £1.90 for 30 minutes' parking and £2.90 for one hour at a pay-and-

display car park.

Casual market traders in the borough will see their fees rise by 5%, while permanent traders will pay an extra 2%. In a report presented to councillors, the council's head of financial strategy Linda Murray said the uplift aimed to "strike a balance between cost recovery and supporting local enterprise".

Changes will also be made to how parents and guardians are fined for children missing school through unauthorised absences.

They are currently handed a £120 penalty each, which is reduced to £60 if paid within 21 days. Under the new scheme, that discounted fee will be raised to £80.

The town hall hopes this will bring in £40,000 next year, depending on the number of penalties issued.

Waltham Forest is set to agree its budget on 26th February.

NEWS

Church at centre of homeless shelter row to be sold on open market

North Chingford Methodist Church will be put up for sale after trustees rejected community rental proposals – a previously church-backed homeless shelter plan had faced strong local opposition



North Chingford Methodist Church
Credit David Bishop

by Marco Marcelline

A Chingford church will be sold on the open market after proposals to let it out for community use were rejected by trustees.

North Chingford Methodist Church, which shut to worship in 2023, had been reviewing expressions of interest in the space until last month.

Conservative councillors had strongly backed a plan by local group E4 Social which would have seen dance classes, community events, skills training, and pre-school education at the church.

The Tories said at the time of the consultation period: "At a time when North Chingford has a shortage of community space for hire, the opportunity to reopen this site for public use is more important than ever. Restoring this space would meet a genuine need for affordable, flexible venues that serve residents of all ages and backgrounds."

But, in a statement released to the *Echo*, trustees said "none"

of the proposals that had been submitted to them had "assured them that sufficient income would be received".

Under charity law, the Methodist Church is legally obliged to demonstrate that resources are being used to fulfil their stated purposes as effectively as they can.

E4 Social's idea was rejected as it would have required the premises to be let at a "significantly below market rate" that trustees felt they could not justify.

E4 Social's proposal was born in the wake of local opposition to an early bid by Forest Churches Emergency Night Shelter (FCENS) to transform the empty church into a homeless shelter.

FCENS has been providing winter shelter and food for homeless people in Waltham Forest for over 15 years, and is currently operating next to the YMCA in Forest Road, Walthamstow.

The plan centered around 14 bedrooms for single adults "with low support needs" at the back of the church, while

a drop-in advice hub would have been built in the front. The proposal also included a multi-purpose room for workshops, skills training and community activities.

Despite having the tentative backing of the Methodist Circuit, which owns the church, FCENS was strongly

opposed by sections of the local community who feared an increase in antisocial behaviour and open drug use.

FCENS however stated that the risk of antisocial behaviour would be minimal, insisting that its services are not for individuals dealing with alcoholism or drug addiction.

Amid the backlash, FCENS withdrew its bid in September and the Methodist Circuit said it would hear alternative expressions of interest in the site.

The *Echo* understands that trustees are hopeful that any successful buyer will maintain the site as a community resource, despite rejecting the prior rented proposals.

Conservative councillors Mitchell Goldie, Kay Isa, and Kelly Summers issued a joint statement stating: "We remain committed to championing accessible and affordable community spaces in North Chingford, and will continue to work with the Methodist Circuit and any future owners to ensure a sensible and community-focused approach to the development of the site."

The process to sell the property will begin in the new year.



North Chingford Methodist Church Credit David Bishop

People playing table tennis at a warm space,
Credit Better/GLL



Seven Waltham Forest leisure centres host 'warm spaces' this winter

Daytime sessions are open to all residents with free hot drinks, showers and internet access offered

Seven leisure centres across Waltham Forest are hosting 'warm spaces' this winter.

Open to members and non-members of the borough's Better-run leisure centres, they are offering local residents a warm space, hot shower, free Wi-Fi, a place to charge their phones, and a complimentary hot drink.

The warm spaces at Score Centre in Leyton, Walthamstow Leisure Centre, Chingford Leisure Centre, Leyton Leisure Centre, Walthamstow Stadium and Leytonstone Leisure Centre opened this week and continue until 13th March.

To maximise community engagement, the sessions at Score Leisure Centre and Better Gym Walthamstow Stadium are being delivered in partnership with Leyton Orient Trust.

Daniel O'Connor, partnership manager at Better parent company GLL, said: "Over the past two winters we have had a fantastic local response to the warm spaces initiative with over 2,000 people taking part, so we will be running it in two additional venues this winter to help even more people."

"Our staff will be on hand at all seven venues to welcome anyone in our community who is struggling this winter."

For more information on warm spaces operating from Better leisure centres:
Visit better.org.uk/healthy-communities/warm-spaces

Additional games and activities to encourage community engagement are also on offer at each venue:

- **Score Leisure Centre – Mondays, 12–3pm:** Chair-based exercise and food
- **Walthamstow Leisure Centre – Tuesdays, 10.30am–1pm:** Pilates, bat and chat table tennis
- **Chingford Leisure Centre – Wednesdays, 11am–1pm:** Bat and chat table tennis and board games
- **Leyton Leisure Centre – Wednesdays, 11.30am–2pm:** Board games
- **Walthamstow Stadium – Thursdays, 12–3pm:** Chair-based exercise and food
- **Leytonstone Leisure Centre – Fridays, 9.30am–12pm:** Board games
- **Waltham Forest Feel Good Centre – Fridays, 10.30am–12.30pm:** Short mat bowls and short tennis (sponge ball)

NEWS



A Walthamstow Market sculpture of a griffin made with discarded plastic celebrated its third birthday in December. Made by artist Sandie M Sutton, the sculpture is a celebration of the history and heritage of Walthamstow Market and is flanked by a unique collection of flags co-created with artist Alisa Ruzavina. Find out more here: artillery.org.uk/griffin | Credit Penny Dampier

Protestors toss 'blood money' at councillors over pension links to Israel

Activists from Waltham Forest for a Free Palestine and Shake the Civ tossed fake "blood money" from the public gallery at a pension fund meeting at the town hall

by Sebastian Mann,
Local Democracy Reporter

Protestors rained 'blood' money down on Waltham Forest councillors in their latest protest against the pension fund's investment in arms companies.

Activists from Waltham Forest for a Free Palestine (WF4FP) and Shake the Civ tossed fake money, altered to look blood-soaked, from the public gallery at a meeting in the town hall last month.

They accused the council and the London Collective Investment Vehicle (LCIV) of having "blood on their hands" through their continued investment in companies linked to the arms trade and Israel.

The council has condemned their behaviour, with leader Grace Williams calling it "disappointing and distressing".

The LCIV manages a collective pool of pension funds on behalf of the 32 councils in the capital. WF4FP has been

pressuring the council to invest in alternative funds – such as green energy – since 2023 in light of Israel's assault on Gaza, which has seen more than 70,000 Palestinians killed.

The council's pension committee meets quarterly, and has been regularly discussing divestment with officials from across London. Members of the LCIV were due to attend the meeting, but did not show up.

Waltham Forest committed to divesting from such companies in early 2024, but says progress will be slow. The council divested fully from fossil fuels in 2022, but the process took a total of six years.

Speaking after the protest, a WF4FP spokesperson said: "We protested with hundreds of local residents outside last night's pension committee meeting to let the council and the LCIV know their delays and excuses on full divestment are not acceptable.

"As usual, the pension committee played the blame game,

naming other local councils and the absent LCIV for a lack of progress on divestment.

"After they had congratulated themselves for doing everything they could, we disrupted the meeting and shut it down to protest their lack of urgency. We threw blood red paper money over their heads as they tried to quiet our call to action before stopping the meeting and leaving the room."

Cllr Williams, who took control of the authority in 2021, said the disruptive protest "added to a very concerning picture of continued targeting of individual councillors on social media and at surgeries, and in the worst case of intimidation and harassment".

"Activists have the right to



Protesters outside Waltham Forest Town Hall on Wednesday, 26th November Credit WF4FP

express their views, but we will take every step necessary to keep councillors and staff safe," she said.

WF4FP said equating "protest and communications," which includes sending emails and attending councillor surgeries, with harassment and intimidation was "disturbing and deeply concerning to us".

"We categorically refute allegations of intimidation or harassment of any councillors," the spokesperson added.

So far, the pension committee has agreed on a clear criteria of which companies it should avoid and is taking financial advice.

Cllr Williams said the council has been "open and honest with local campaigners, residents, and the people who rely on the pension fund that any divestment is a complicated process that we must get right".

"Serious structural change takes time and careful planning," she said.



Bin strike cancelled after union accepts fresh pay offer

Rolling strikes had been due to take place over the Christmas and new year period

Refuse, street scene and grounds maintenance workers in Waltham Forest called off planned strikes over Christmas and the new year after accepting a last-minute pay deal.

Rolling strikes had been due to start on Wednesday, 11th December. The strikes had been looming since the summer, when members of the GMB union rejected a 2.8% pay offer. A follow-up offer of 3.2% was similarly rejected.

But the outsourced workers, employed by FCC Environment on behalf of Waltham Forest Council, have now voted in favour of a "more generous settlement".

The offer will see those workers on London Living Wage receive £14.50 an hour, back-dated to August – an increase of almost 4.7% on the 2024/25 rate. Those on higher salaries will receive a 3.6% increase, backdated to April.

Pay talks will restart this month when, in addition to further salary increases, sick pay, staff facilities, and overtime will also be on the table.

Mary Goodson, GMB regional organiser, said: "We are pleased that FCC has seen sense and put forward a much-improved offer.

"Our members stood strong against low pay and won a better deal for themselves and their colleagues without the need for industrial action.

"This result shows what workers can achieve when they stand together and show they are prepared to fight for what they deserve.

"It is an excellent start, and we look forward to more constructive discussions with the FCC."

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We are the developers and architects behind The Arches E11, and we invite you to take just two minutes to share your thoughts and feedback on our proposals. You can do this by scanning the QR code or visiting our website: www.thearchese11.co.uk.

A New Destination for Leytonstone

We are proposing an exciting new mixed-use destination for Leytonstone, located directly opposite the train station and replacing a former builder's offices and storage yard. This prominent site marks the entrance to Leytonstone town centre and presents a unique opportunity to create a place that serves both the local community and the wider area.



A Design Rooted in Local Character

As local developers who know the area well, we have been working closely with our architects to design a bold and characterful new building that celebrates



the site's industrial heritage. The architecture features pitched roofs, flying bridges and intricate metalwork, drawing inspiration from the historic railway arches whilst creating a distinctive new modern landmark.

Supporting Independent Businesses

Leytonstone is known for its diverse and vibrant community, with a strong culture of independent shops, creative industries and makers. Our proposals are designed to build on this character, offering something different from typical high street uses such as coffee chains, betting shops or mobile phone retailers.

Flexible, affordable workspaces are clustered around a central yard and along the railway edge, activating the street and creating a new pedestrian route known as 'Arch Walk'. These spaces are intended to attract independent businesses, artists and makers, helping to establish a lively and creative hub where a new community can grow and thrive.

New Homes in a Sustainable Location

Located on an under-used and unattractive brownfield site, the scheme will deliver much-needed housing alongside sustainable commercial spaces in a highly accessible urban location. The proposals include 39

high-quality new homes, just a short journey from Central London, and also with easy access to greenery and nature, with nearby Wanstead flats and Epping Forest.

Designed for a Low-Carbon Future

From an environmental perspective, we have worked hard to integrate energy-efficient and low-carbon systems throughout the scheme. These include high levels of insulation and airtightness, air source heat pumps and photovoltaic panels on the roof. The development will be car-free, with generous cycle storage for both residents and businesses, helping to reduce emissions and encourage sustainable travel.

Enhancing Biodiversity

The proposals introduce extensive biodiversity-enhancing green roofs, new trees and soft landscaping. Attractive, permeable and planted surfaces will be provided throughout the site, creating a greener and more pleasant environment.

Community Support and Next Steps

We have already received overwhelmingly positive support from the local community, highlighting a clear demand for this type of development in this location. We believe the social and economic benefits of the scheme will be widely felt.

We are keen to hear from the wider community and would welcome your feedback on our proposals, along with any thoughts or ideas as to how we can make this development a success. You can do this by scanning the QR code or visiting our website: www.thearchese11.co.uk



NEWS

Much-delayed Leytonstone estate rebuild to begin in 'mid 2027'

Avenue Road Estate residents will be allowed to move into new social rented homes by mid-2030, as the council pursues an institutional investor to fund the scheme

Avenue Road Estate
Credit Patrick Dowse



by Marco Marcelline

Construction on the much-delayed Avenue Road Estate redevelopment in Leytonstone will begin in mid-2027, Waltham Forest Council has confirmed.

The news comes as it was revealed the council will pursue an institutional investor model to deliver the first phase of the scheme, rather than a traditional developer-backed model.

In a cabinet report approved in December, the council deemed an institutional model approach as more affordable, stating it could not commit the level of upfront capital investment required for a traditional developer-backed scheme.

Institutional investors are large organisations like pension

funds, insurance companies, mutual funds, sovereign wealth funds, and large asset managers.

The *Echo* understands that 116 social rent units will be delivered as part of the first phase, with completion earmarked for late 2029 and first occupation by 2030.

A further 501 homes will be delivered as part of the second phase, which may still be delivered through a more traditional developer-backed model. That phase will deliver an additional 126 social rented homes, ensuring all 242 existing council homes are replaced.

91.5% of Avenue Road Estate residents voted in favour of rebuilding the estate in 2021 and planning for 617 new flats was approved in January 2023. When residents signed up to the scheme, they were

under the impression that the first phase of the development would be complete in 2026.

But in August 2023, developer Bellway backed out of a joint deal with the council to rebuild the estate, saying it was no longer financially "viable" due to difficult market conditions.

In a bid to keep the promise of regeneration alive after Bellway pulled out, in July 2024 the council secured a total of £190million from the Greater London Authority (GLA) towards five strategic projects in the borough, including Avenue Road.

Efforts were then made to secure another developer, with the council's director of housing delivery Mark Crane telling residents at a meeting in summer 2024: "We will robustly test the business

strength of any potential partner, but also make sure that their case is realistic and ensure there are contingencies within their budgets to absorb financial risks."

However, due to a range of factors including "rising build costs, stalled sales values, and the council's financial circumstances", it was decided a traditional developer backed model was no longer viable.

Because of revisions to the delivery structure, a further engagement exercise with residents will begin this month.

A fresh report will be brought back to cabinet in late summer 2026 to approve the final terms agreed with an institutional investment partner, before construction begins the following year.

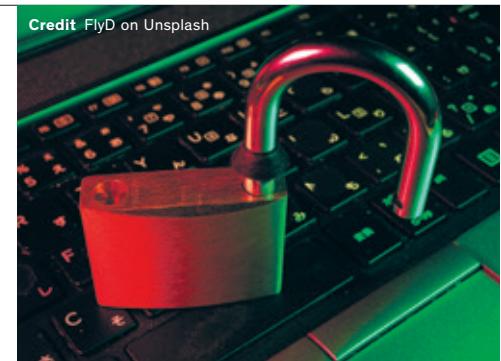
Residents of the 1960s estate have previously told the *Echo* about rampant open drug taking and anti-social behaviour.

One resident, who also criticised the regeneration delay, said: "Our mental health hasn't got years [to wait for a rebuild]; we've got kids playing right next to drug users strapping up and shooting drugs."

Occupants have also spoken about a range of structural issues with the estate, which was built using prefabricated concrete panels. These include "building movement", "gaps in stairs and window frames", and "leaking ceilings".

One resident said he had seen mice running around his bedroom because the wall had moved away from the skirting board, leaving a gap for the rodents to come through.

Another said: "My window doesn't match my frame. We're feeling movement. The building is definitely moving and our flats are showing it."



Barts takes legal action after mass data hack

by Marco Marcelline

Barts Health NHS Trust has sought a High Court order to prevent the wide release of patient and staff data stolen from its servers by Russian-speaking ransomware group Cl0p.

Cl0p, which has extorted over \$500million in ransom payments globally since 2019, exploited a loophole in the Oracle E-Business suite software to steal files from a Barts database containing invoices.

The stolen files include names and addresses of individuals who were liable to pay for treatment or services at a Barts Health hospital over several years.

Barts, which manages Whips Cross Hospital, stated that electronic patient records and clinical systems "are not affected" by the breach, insisting that its core IT infrastructure "remained secure".

The theft occurred in August 2025 but it was only noticed in November when the files were posted on the dark web, Barts admitted.

Explaining who was impacted by the breach, the trust stated: "Some former staff members are listed [in the database] because they left employment owing the trust for salary sacrifice or overpayment. Almost half of the potentially compromised files list suppliers of goods or services whose details are in the public domain."

"The database also includes files relating to accounting services we provided since April 2024 to Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust. We are working with them to minimise the harm to those affected."

"To date no information has been published on the general internet, and the risk is limited to those able to access compressed files on the encrypted dark web."

The NHS trust added: "We are very sorry that this has happened and are taking steps with our suppliers to ensure that it could not happen again."

Barts has informed the National Cyber Security Centre, the Metropolitan Police, and the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) about the incident.

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POLITICS

Calvin Bailey ‘inadvertently’ breached parliamentary code of conduct

by Marco Marcelline

Leyton and Wanstead MP Calvin Bailey “inadvertently” breached the parliamentary code of conduct when he wrote a letter to the standards commissioner about another MP who is facing a live misconduct investigation.

On 24th September 2025, Bailey wrote to the parliamentary commissioner for standards David Greenberg about the ongoing investigation into the unnamed parliamentarian.

Greenberg immediately referred the letter to the committee on parliamentary standards, whose members have since found

it to have breached rule 14 of the code of conduct for members of the house.

The rule states that MPs “must not lobby the commissioner in a manner



Calvin Bailey MP
Credit UK Parliament

calculated or intended to influence his consideration of whether a breach of the code of conduct has occurred, or in relation to the imposition of a sanction”.

The *Echo* understands that Bailey has accepted the committee’s findings, has apologised to the commissioner, and has sought to withdraw his letter.

In its findings, the committee wrote: “We concur, however, with the commissioner’s view that the breach is minor and inadvertent. Mr Bailey’s action, no matter how well intentioned, was muddled and clearly inappropriate. He has learned a lesson and has promised to reflect on how to raise matters more properly in future.”

The members added: “We are unable to publish a full report on his conduct at this stage because the case about which Mr Bailey approached the Com-

missioner remains unresolved and we would seek not to breach confidentiality in relation to that case or potentially to affect its progress.”

Bailey responded to the findings, saying: “I want to thank the committee for their speedy resolution of this case, and for their recognition that my letter to the commissioner was well-intentioned and only inadvertently breached the rule.

“This judgement is a valuable reminder of the constraints on how parliamentarians can raise concerns about an MP’s conduct and its impact on ourselves, colleagues and our constituents.

“I hope it will be of benefit to all colleagues as a reminder that writing to the commissioner once an investigation has been launched into an incident is seen very differently than

doing so beforehand or in other ways. I very much look forward to the full facts of this case being out there for all to see.”

Standards commissioner Greenberg is currently investigating ex-Reform MP

James McMurdoch over alleged racial abuse against a Sky News journalist.

The sitting independent for South Basildon and East Thurrock is alleged to have posted the single letter “N” under an X/Twitter post that was critical of political correspondent Mhairi Aurora.

In a letter to Greenberg calling for an investigation, Conservative MP Ben Obese-Jecty accused McMurdoch of facilitat-



James McMurdoch MP
Credit UK Parliament

ing an “N Tower” chain where users collaboratively spell out a deeply offensive racial slur across multiple posts or comments.

Former Chingford MP candidate Shama Tatler nominated to House of Lords

by Marco Marcelline

The Brent Labour councillor, who lost to Sir Iain Duncan Smith in the 2024 general election, will be made a Baroness

Shama Tatler, the Brent councillor who unsuccessfully stood for Labour in Chingford and Woodford Green in last year’s general election, has been nominated to the House of Lords.

Tatler was included in Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer’s peer nominations list last month among 24 other names.

As well as being a councillor in Brent, Tatler is vice-chair of the London Labour Regional Executive, patron of the Labour Housing Group and head of the Labour Group Office at the Local Government Association (LGA).

LGA Labour celebrated her nomination saying: “Huge congratulations to our

head of office, councillor Shama Tatler, on her appointment to the House of Lords. All of us at LGA Labour are thoroughly delighted for her.”

She lost to incumbent Conservative MP Sir Iain Duncan Smith in the general election last July, receiving 12,524 votes to Duncan Smith’s 17,281. Her vote tally was just 79 more than independent candidate Faiza Shaheen’s 12,445.

Tatler’s announcement as a Labour candidate came amid significant media attention on the deselection of Shaheen, who was removed by the party in May 2024 following tweets she liked that were deemed problematic by Labour’s National Executive Committee.

Local Labour members resigned en masse, citing what they called Shaheen’s unfair treatment by the party and Tatler faced harsh criticism from irate left-wingers both in and out of the constituency.

Amid criticism that she was a “parachuted-in candidate”, Tatler told the *Echo* last year: “I’m commuting here every day. I’m here every day. I’m speaking to residents all the time. My team and I have



Shama Tatler Credit London Labour

spoken to over 12,000 people since my candidacy. Once my 15-year-old daughter finishes year eleven, I’m looking to shift over [to Chingford].”

Speaking after the election result was announced, a visibly upset Shaheen said she would have won the seat had the Labour Party not deselected her shortly after the election was announced in May.

Shaheen said: “I’m so angry with [Labour] right now. That shouldn’t have happened. Their candidate now gets to go back to Brent, and now my community, the community that I live in, we are going to struggle along.

“I know we’re going to be so disappointed to have Iain Duncan Smith all over again and be disappointed that we could have won if it hadn’t been for the lies and what the Labour Party did to me. It’s a real shame but there’s something beautiful that’s been born from this.”

The left-winger has since been appointed executive director of Tax Justice UK, which pushes for policies such as a wealth tax and closing corporate loopholes.

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BETTER

NEWS

Over half of London ambulance staff attacked on duty

More than half of ambulance crews in London have experienced physical violence in the last year, figures show



Paramedic Emily Jackson was attacked on duty
Credit: London Ambulance Service

by Marco Marcelline

Figures released by London Ambulance Service (LAS) in December show that 53% of frontline staff have been attacked while

on duty, and 562 of them were assaulted three or more times in just twelve months.

The LAS' latest staff survey also found that 44% had been sexually harassed by patients or members of the public.

Amid the high rate of violence, LAS has launched an anti-abuse campaign.

A video released for the campaign shows a patient who tries to kick and punch a paramedic before smashing her iPad.

Emily Jackson, 31, is seen looking frightened in the video as the patient is threatening to kill her.

But she says the most traumatic assault happened one December when she was called to a pub to treat a man seriously ill after drinking and taking drugs.

She said: "It was this time of year – when people are out drinking or partying. Our patient was unconscious on the floor and I was really worried about him.

"He was struggling to breathe and I worried he was going to stop breathing and go into cardiac arrest. We were getting ready to do an ECG when he regained consciousness. He was friendly at first then suddenly switched.

"He looked ready to fight the whole pub and made sexually aggressive comments to me.

He was throwing punches and I got hit in the face."

The attacker left the pub but walked back in soon after.

"It was like a horror film – I just froze. He threatened to rape me and said he would dump my body in an alleyway. That threat frightened me more than when he was throwing punches; it chilled me."

Emily says she was well supported by her team and wanted to continue working but a few days later had a breakdown.

She added: "It wasn't the first time I'd been attacked at work, and it wasn't the last. It takes its toll."

Emily's attacker was jailed for eight months for beating and threatening an emergency worker.

LAS chief executive Jason Killeen said: "Any violence, threats or harassment is completely unacceptable. No one should face this at work and on top of the hurt and harm it causes our people, it can prevent us from caring for patients who need our help. All we are asking for is respect – on the phone, on the road and in the communities we serve."

'Thousands' of families to benefit from scrapping two child benefit cap

by Sebastian Mann, Local Democracy Reporter

Cutting the two-child benefit cap could help more than 23,000 children across north and east London, Labour figures show.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves announced an end to the cap from April 2026, in the autumn budget.

The controversial policy, introduced by the Conservatives in 2017, means parents can only claim Universal Credit for their first two children.

The change will cost around £3 billion a year by 2029, and has been criticised by the Tories say taxpayers shouldn't pay for higher benefits.

Early figures presented by Labour show the policy will benefit 7,900 children in Waltham Forest, 8,700 children in Redbridge, 6,520 children in Haringey – around 23,120 in total.

Waltham Forest Council leader Grace Williams said she supported the cap being lifted.

The Labour councillor said: "This council has long campaigned for the removal of the two-child benefit cap. Its removal will lift local children out of poverty and help support the poorest families in our community."

Walthamstow MP Stella Creasy said it would make a "life-changing difference" to many families in Walthamstow, and presented figures suggesting 3,850 children will be helped.

The government says the move will lift around 450,000 children out of poverty by the end of the decade, but critics are sceptical of its economic impact.

Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch said her party's policy struck the balance between "supporting people who are struggling and protecting taxpayers who are struggling themselves".

She added: "They are hiking taxes on workers, pensioners and savers to pay for handouts to keep their backbenchers quiet."

Not enough being done to reduce road casualties, Mayor warned

by Kumail Jaffer, Local Democracy Reporter

Sir Sadiq Khan has been urged to increase efforts to reduce deaths on London's roads and transport network after new figures showed just three fewer people were killed or seriously injured in 2024 compared to the previous year.

The London mayor has pledged to eliminate all deaths and serious casualties outright by 2041 as part of his Vision Zero Action Plan. He has also set an interim deadline of 2030 to reduce casualties from the 2010–2014 baseline figure of 4,870 by 70%, to 1,461. But 3,707 people were killed

or seriously injured on London's roads in 2024, three fewer than the 3,710 victims in the year before and just a 24% reduction from over a decade ago. In their annual Travel in London report in December, Transport for London (TfL) admitted that "more needs to be done" but said it was still the "lowest figure outside the pandemic years".

Green Party London Assembly member Caroline Russell told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS): "Bereaved families and Londoners with life changing injuries are paying the unacceptable price of systemic danger on our roads.

"Transport for London knows



it is not on track to meet their Vision Zero target of no one being killed or seriously injured on the road by 2041 and needs

to push ahead with urgent measures to reduce road harm. They could roll out 20mph speed limits everywhere, introduce more pedestrian crossings, and fix lethal junctions to reduce traffic danger across London."

In 2018, a joint action plan was published by the mayor, TfL and the Metropolitan Police outlining the steps needed to eliminate deaths and serious injuries from the transport network.

This included implementing a 20mph limit on all TfL roads within the Congestion Charging Zone by 2020, transforming dangerous junctions and setting tougher safety standards for HGVs and buses.

We love reporting on Waltham Forest but the business of local news publishing is really hard

Between 2007 and 2022, the number of local journalists employed by major news publishers in the UK dropped by two thirds from 8,847 to 2,830, and 293 local newspapers have closed since 2005.

We make local news freely available to people in Waltham Forest but local journalism is not free to produce.

Last year, the Echo published 1,073 news stories. We printed and distributed 180,000 free copies of the newspaper.

We covered important news stories such as the closure of

The Markfield Centre and its impact on adults with special needs and their families.

We published positive features on local sports, arts and charitable activities, celebrating the amazing creativity and community spirit of Waltham Forest residents.

Our supporters and our advertisers make it possible to continue writing, editing, printing and distributing the Echo. It is never less than a struggle.

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ARTS & CULTURE

Solidarity through sound

Anne Quesney from refugee charity Waltham Forest Migrant Action writes about Connection in Sounds, an eclectic live gig in Walthamstow last month that celebrated music from across the globe



On Thursday, 11th December, just a week short of International Migrants Day, over 150 people gathered at the Walthamstow Trades Hall for an evening of global music. Spanning different genres and continents, bands and DJs united in solidarity with migrants.

Connection in Sounds is a collaboration between local charity Waltham Forest Migrant Action and Turkish

acappella, her beautiful voice filling the hall, and London-based band, Nkomba, brought their vibrant mix of Malawian folk and African roots, ending the night in a rousing finale that kept everyone dancing until closing.

But the evening wouldn't have been possible without the close partnership with ZELT. Their relationship with Migrant Action goes back to 2018 when the band partnered with the charity to present their debut show in Walthamstow, backed up by a ten-piece, all-female drum ensemble. Given the global nature of their music, ZELT feel strongly about connecting it with their political stance on immigration – for without it they wouldn't be making the music they make.

dancing are literally everywhere, especially at weddings. Most of the music is built on unusual, complex time signatures like 9/8 and 7/8, which you hear a lot in Eastern European, Balkan music too. And when a 9/8 track drops, everyone unites on the dance floor. It's an incredible experience.

Semra's passion for music really exploded when she travelled across Turkey, meeting and playing with wonderful musicians, including in the Kurdish region where they organised festivals. The government eventually banned them, but that never stopped them from gathering, playing, and creating together.

As the situation deteriorates for migrants here in the UK, Semra remains hopeful. Music is a powerful connection.



ZELT evolved into the current trio after original band members, Phil Seddon and Dave Adams, met Semra Bulut in 2019. She'd been to one of their gigs and, post-Covid, they invited her to join them on stage for their relaunch and discovered that, in addition to playing darbuka, she is also a gifted singer.

Semra is Turkish. She grew up in the Thrace region, where the culture is an awesome mix of Balkan and Eastern European vibes. Both her parents play instruments and sing, so she grew up to the sound of thracian beats, and the traditional music Rumeli.

In Thrace, music and

tor – a source of strength, healing and joy, as well as a form of resistance.

From playing festivals in the Kurdish region, to supporting grassroots organisations like Waltham Forest Migrant Action, she has seen how music can open hearts and create brave spaces, where unity, solidarity and safety become a reality for everyone.

And Connections in Sound did just that. It brought people from across our community closer together, united by their love of music and appetite for justice, at a time of growing uncertainty for people seeking safety.

Find out more about Waltham Forest Migrant Action here: wfma.org.uk

Winners of Waltham Forest Poetry Awards revealed

Amid over 1,000 poetry submissions, Walthamstow's Tusshara Nalakumar Srilatha won the adult prize for her poem *Turn Back the Day*, writes Paul McGrane

The Waltham Forest Poetry Competition has been running annually since 2018.

This year head judge Lorraine Mariner read over 1,000 poems to discover our fantastic winners.

Our theme for this year's awards presented on Thursday, 11th December was Weather/Whether and we received poems from nearly 600 poets.

The adult prize was awarded at the standing-room-only Walthamstow Trades Hall event to Tusshara Nalakumar Srilatha for her poem *Turn Back the Day*. This is the second time in a row that Tusshara has won the prize.

Tusshara said: "This poem was inspired by my last few days studying in Buenos Aires. It was early 2020 and I had planned to be there until the summer. But as the pandemic developed, and travel restrictions loomed, I quickly booked a flight home to be with family."



Adult prize winner Tusshara Nalakumar Srilatha with head judge Lorraine Mariner Credit Paul McGrane

"What followed was a surreal 48 hours of packing, abrupt goodbyes, and walking around the neighbourhood in disbelief. This poem explores the yearning that I felt for more time in the city."

Judge Lorraine said: "I was drawn in by the unexpected image this poem opens with – sunshine as soup – and how the images continue to build, surprising word combinations creating a sensuous, unique language.

"The speaker of the poem is a vampire in reverse, longing for sunlight and the peace this brings them."

The young poet prize was won by Fatima Sara Dar for *The Great Stink*. Fatima, from Leytonstone, is aged eleven and her inspiration for the poem came from her cat Roya, whose cat litter made a great stink ('The naughty little traitor/Mischief-making creator!').

You can read all the winning poems here pctothepowerof2.wordpress.com



HEALTH

Herbal winter warmers

Rasheeqa Ahmad from Community Apothecary Waltham Forest shares traditional winter food and plant practices rooted in community herbal knowledge

As winter settles in, many people look for ways to feel comforted and supported during the colder months, when colds and flu tend to circulate more widely. Alongside rest, warm food and following NHS advice when unwell, some residents also draw on long-standing kitchen and garden traditions that use herbs and spices as part of everyday seasonal routines.

At Community Apothecary Waltham Forest, local volunteers share traditional herbal knowledge rooted in food, plants and community practice. These approaches are not a substitute for medical care, but are valued by many as part of a broader sense of seasonal wellbeing.

Fresh and dried herbs are a familiar

part of many kitchens, particularly during winter cooking. Aromatic plants such as thyme, sage, rosemary, oregano, marjoram, basil, bay and peppermint have long been used for flavour and fragrance, and are often enjoyed in warm meals and drinks at this time of year.

Some people like to prepare simple herbal infusions using these plants, much as they would make a pot of tea, enjoying the warmth and aroma throughout the day. Others simply use them generously in soups, stews and roasted dishes, finding them uplifting during freezing weather.

Spices such as cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, fennel, ginger and black pepper are staples in many cuisines around the world and are commonly associated with winter drinks and desserts. Traditionally, these spices were valued for their strong aromas and for the warmth they bring to food and drink.

Some plants, including elderflower, yarrow, peppermint, rosehip and bay, have a long history in European folk traditions. They are often mentioned in old household herbals and are still used today by people interested in traditional plant knowledge.

Meanwhile, the strong smelling plants of the mint family – thyme, sage, rose-



Herbs and chillies used for winter warming drinks
Credit Waltham Forest Community Apothecary

mary, oregano, marjoram, hyssop, basil, lavender, savory, lemon balm and peppermint – are rich in volatile oils that give scent and flavour to food for us.

Adding them to your meals brings antioxidant elements, but you can also make daily pots of tea with them. Put a handful of these herbs if fresh, or one teaspoon per

cup if dried, into a teapot or cafetière, fill with freshly boiled water, cover and leave to infuse for ten to 15 minutes.

Then you can drink cups through the day as you work (make and take a flaskful with you if you are out). Inhale the steam as well. Those oils evaporate with heat, so make sure your pot is covered to keep them in the tea.

At Community Apothecary Waltham Forest, volunteers run sessions where participants can learn about these traditions, how plants were historically prepared, and how people today choose to incorporate them into food, drink or seasonal rituals.

At Community Apothecary we make seasonal batches of fire cider, which you can also make at home – a mix of hot, spicy food ingredients such as onions, garlic, ginger, turmeric, horseradish, chillies, oranges and lemons, as well as the herbs mentioned above, infused in raw apple cider vinegar for about a month and then strained. Traditionally, a spoonful is taken daily through the winter. You can get some from us!

Community Apothecary Waltham Forest holds fortnightly medicine-making and learning sessions at the Hornbeam Centre in Walthamstow on the first and third Wednesdays of each month (11am–1pm), followed by a shared lunch. Sessions are open to anyone interested in learning more about traditional plant use and community skills.

Visit communityapothecarywf.org

Anyone experiencing flu or persistent symptoms should follow NHS guidance, including rest, hydration and seeking medical advice where appropriate

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PHOTOGRAPHY

Laimons: With Eastern European roots but born and bred in Yorkshire, Laimons has lived in London now for almost 50 years. He wisely says: 'You're born and then you die, it's up to you what you do in-between.'



Rukaiya: Rukaiya has a wonderful and infectious zest for life. Whether it's building women's confidence cycling on London's roads or running marathons – she can do it all!



A Portrait of Walthamstow

by Issy Laight

I am a documentary photographer and visual storyteller based in Walthamstow. My work explores themes of identity, place, and belonging, often focusing on everyday people and the quiet beauty of ordinary life.

I've lived in London a long time and moved to Walthamstow early last year. I wanted to get to know the people who make up this area and feel more connected to where I live.

I put a call out on local Facebook groups offering a portrait in exchange for a conversation over a cup of tea. I didn't

expect much, but the post blew up – I had over a hundred comments and messages!

I then met and photographed ten people, each bringing along an object that meant something to them. I loved how open everyone was and how willing they were to share their stories.

The project became a lovely way to meet locals and explore what community means. It reminded me how kind and curious people can be when given the chance to connect.

Find out more: issylaight.com | Instagram: @issylaight

Saira & Farooq: The love and generosity from this wonderful couple radiated when I met them. They run a food bank in Waltham Forest and have a wealth of experience in helping others.



Hilary: An intelligent and curious woman, Hilary and I shared some very vulnerable conversations which I really treasure.



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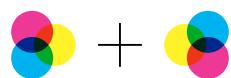
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ST JAMES STREET

Bar forced to shut early amid noise complaints

by Sebastian Mann,
Local Democracy Reporter

A Walthamstow restaurant has been banned from playing loud music and must close earlier following complaints from locals.

BlackStar Bar and Grill, in St James Street, has been the subject of up to 30 noise complaints over the past two years, prompting Waltham Forest Council to take action.

The town hall's licensing team said it wanted to support the business but the operators had not taken steps to address "unresolved" problems with noise.

Residents living nearby the venue complained about "continuous noise" and "late-night disturbance".

In a letter to the council, one local said that the issue had been "ongoing for years, and we are truly exhausted".

The venue was previously

licensed to close at 11pm on weekdays and until 2am on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

At a hearing on Tuesday, 16th December, the council's licensing committee voted to cut its Monday to Saturday hours to 11pm and Sunday hours to 10.30pm.

It has also been stripped of the right to play live or recorded music beyond a background level, after licensing officers told councillors the venue was "not fit for what they are doing".

No representatives from the restaurant turned up to the hearing. BlackStar Bar and Grill has been contacted for comment.

The council first issued a noise abatement notice to the restaurant in February.

Inspectors from the noise pollution team found no further issues on three follow-up visits in March, April and June, but the number of complaints reportedly



BlackStar Bar and Grill
Credit: Sebastian Mann

increased during the warmer summer months.

Under the previous licence, BlackStar agreed to serve alcohol only with meals and keep "soothing background music suited to a restaurant" to a low level.

According to event venue hire website TagVenue, the African bar and grill – formerly Big T's Diner – hosts "summer parties, office parties, product launches, networking events, christenings, comedy evenings, private dining, baby showers, fancy dress parties, and children's parties".

CHINGFORD

Chingford woman celebrates 101st birthday at Christmas lights switch-on

Doris with Sam and Lisa from The Spinney
Credit: The Spinney



Chingford care home resident Doris Griffiths turned on the Christmas lights at The Spinney in Forest View for her 101st birthday on Wednesday, 3rd December.

Doris wished everyone a "Merry Christmas" as she flicked the switch to illuminate the care home for the festive season, all while accompanied by two Humboldt penguins.

"What an honour and a lovely way to mark my birthday," said Doris, who was layered up with

blankets against the cold of the early evening.

The party was attended by residents and their families, team members, and neighbours from the local community. The Spinney was decorated for the festive season with fairy lights and a row of Christmas trees.

"Doris is quite the character," said Samantha Carey, lifestyle coordinator at The Spinney.

"She loves playing bingo, going out for walks, and visiting our beauty salon, and she's forged a

strong friendship group here at The Spinney.

"We loved that we could make her birthday extra special by inviting her to switch on the Christmas lights. It's wonderful to offer her a new experience at such an age!"

The care home's lifestyle team also organised for two Humboldt penguins, Pringle and Widget, to visit from Heythrop Zoological Gardens in Oxfordshire.

Doris was born in 1924, she and late husband Alfred have one daughter, Sandra, four grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

Singer Brandon entertained everyone by performing carols and Christmas songs, including Doris' favourite festive song, *Driving Home for Christmas* by Chris Rea.

The Spinney is rated 'good' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and won a Great British Care Award in 2023 for 'Dignity in Care'.

BLACKHORSE ROAD

Man killed in car crash outside station

A young man was killed in a car crash outside Blackhorse Road Station shortly after midnight on Friday, 12th December.

Emergency services were called to Walthamstow at 12.30am to reports of a collision at the junction of Blackhorse Road and Forest Road.

The 26-year-old victim had been walking when he was killed by a car that collided into him outside the station.

Paramedics treated him at the scene but he sadly died shortly after.

The driver, 52, suffered minor injuries and was subsequently arrested on suspicion of causing death by dangerous driving.

The Metropolitan Police said the car rammed into a building following the collision.

Speaking the following day,

Walthamstow MP Stella Creasy said: "[I am] devastated by the news of last night's fatal road traffic accident outside Blackhorse Road station.

"I will be seeking an urgent update from Transport for London on the site and how we can improve safety there.

"Thoughts very much with the victim and their friends and family as well as those who witnessed it and tried to help."

A spokesperson for the Met Police said: "Paramedics treated the pedestrian, a 26-year-old man, at the scene, but he was sadly pronounced dead at 1.04am. His next-of-kin have been informed and are being supported by specialist officers."

Anyone with information or dashcam footage in relation to this incident is asked to contact Police on 101, quoting CAD 149/12DEC25

LEYTON

Night market to launch next month

by Sebastian Mann,
Local Democracy Reporter

A new, weekly night market has been given permission to open in Leyton.

Traders will be selling beers, food and goods in an industrial estate off Skeltons Lane from February.

It had previously operated as a Christmas market under temporary approval from Waltham Forest Council, and the full-time scheme was green-lit by councillors on Tuesday, 16th December.

The weekly market will be licensed to run from 5pm until 11pm on Fridays and from 12pm until 11pm on Saturdays and Sundays.

Live music will only be permitted until 10pm, while



The current Christmas Market Credit: Leyton Calling

alcohol sales will need to cease at 10.30pm.

Organisers Leyton Calling say they do not plan to open as early as midday so as to avoid disrupting other markets, but need the flexibility for the sake of seasonal events.

"We're extremely happy about [the approval]," Leyton Calling co-director Danny Saunders said.

"It means we can start looking, next year, to putting it on as a proper night market."

LETTERS

Unnecessary roadworks

Dear WFE

IN THE DECEMBER ISSUE YOU reported on a major scheme of changes in Chingford Road.

I'd like to understand how it is that millions continue to be spent on road projects in the borough. Are these funded completely separately from the rest of the budget, including staff salaries?

Anyone who has been to the top of Walthamstow High Street in recent months will have been amazed to witness an extraordinary and presumably very costly long-term closure of road and pavement in order to install concrete cobbles and a wiggling road design.

Every weekday, a small number of workers toil slowly with measuring tape and angle grinders to hew tough blocking into delicate patterns to complete this ornate and disruptive plan.

New planters will be sited on top of solid concrete, which will dry out in summer and prevent any young trees grown in them to reach maturity, as happened with the other planters (now removed) in the area.

It would be good to know that this well-meaning but unnecessary work isn't drawing on general council funding.

Nigel Pollitt
Walthamstow

Workplace deaths

Dear WFE

DECEMBER MARKED TWO years since roofer Ekarmjeet Singh's death in Leytonstone and yet police are still investigating it along with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

This means a coroner's inquest will not be held any time soon.

No-one is served well by what is going on. The family and friends

of those killed at work should not have to wait years for resolution of their loved one's case in the courts. I know it will be torture for many of them. And it does not serve society well.

Whilst the authorities have finally been forced to recognise the preventable nature of most "accidents" at work that kill, it is absolutely unacceptable for these cases to take so long to conclude.

If it is a resource problem, then it must be addressed. If it is a political problem, then it must be sorted out. If it is a laissez faire attitude towards cases such as these, management must prioritise this work and make sure these cases are thoroughly investigated and decisions made promptly. And this must be done now.

Mick Holder, occupational and environmental health and safety campaigner

Unsafe playground

Dear WFE

THERE ARE MAJOR HEALTH and safety issues with the new Chase Lane playground. Waltham Forest Council used its levelling up grant to improve the play area but these improvements included digging ditches and dips, then putting large rocks in them.

These installations have had some near misses with children falling down accidentally and their heads narrowly missing the boulders.

With the recent rains one ditch is now full to overflowing with water with a depth of about 18 inches or more. These are very obvious hazards in a playground.

Council officers and ward councillors have been contacted by numerous people, while local MP Sir Iain Duncan Smith says he is working to get this resolved.

Geoff Philbey
Chingford

Send us your letters

Got an opinion on something in Waltham Forest? We accept letters of up to 150 words from people and organisations in the borough. Email wfecho@socialspider.com before the next deadline on Monday 19th January

LISTINGS

RUN CLUB

Kindred Runners

Tuesdays, 7pm and Fridays, 9am
Locations around Leytonstone and Epping Forest

We're focused on making coached, accessible running available locally - especially for beginners, parents and everyday runners looking for structure and progression.

Every Tuesday at 7pm we run a coach-led speed session, with structured workouts focusing on speed, strength and running form. It's open to all levels, and fully adaptable to needs.

Meanwhile every Friday at 9am, we have a social 5km easy-paced, and community-led run - ideal for parents post school drop-off. All sessions run around Leytonstone, Epping Forest, and Forest Gate on a mix of road and trail.

Find out more: bookwhen.com/kindredrunners

CHAIR YOGA

Chair yoga for people with Parkinson's

Every Tuesday from 11am to 12pm
Winchester Road Methodist Church, 82 Winchester Road, Chingford, E4 9JP

Fully funded by Parkinson's UK Physical Activity Grant and delivered by Yanar Alkayat - a highly experienced CNHC-registered yoga therapist and founder of Yanar Mind & Movement - these chair-based yoga classes are designed for all ages, abilities, levels of mobility and stages of the condition - no prior yoga experience needed.

The sessions are also suitable for wheelchair users and gentle enough for those using walking and mobility aids. Relatives and carers are welcome to join, meet others and enjoy moving together, too.

Free
Find out more: mindandmovement.uk or @yanarmindmovement on social media

GRIEF

Death Cafe

Thurs 8th January, 5.15pm-6.45pm
Leytonstone Library, 6 Church Lane E11 1HG

A Death Cafe is a safe, confidential and friendly space for people to come together and talk openly and honestly about death, dying, and making the most of our finite lives. Small groups sit around a table and conversation flows without agenda or direction. The conversation is led by the people in the group and each session is unique. It's important to note that Death Cafe is not a bereavement/grief support resource and we advise that you do not attend if you have been very recently bereaved and your grief feels very raw. A hot drink and biscuits will be available!

Free, reserve a spot by searching 'Leytonstone Death Cafe' on Eventbrite

CABARET

The Double R Club

Thurs 15th January, 8pm- 11.30pm
Walthamstow Trades Hall, 61-63 Tower Hamlets Rd E17 4RQ

Join your aberrant host Benjamin Louche, together with a cast of some of our favourite and new deranged dream-selves and impossible visitations, for a vertiginous and beautiful evening of darkness and confusion.

Think the finger-clicking jazz ambience of cult TV show Twin Peaks, the absurdist monochrome machine world of Eraserhead, the dark underbelly of Mulholland Drive, to the surreal small-town madness of Blue Velvet, this is an evening of 'damn fine' lynchian cabaret and burlesque, of mystery and nightmares from the deepest river of your dreams.

Find tickets from £11
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COMEDY

Harriet Kemsley

Friday 16th January, 8pm-10.15pm
The Birds, 692 High Road Leytonstone E11 3AA

Good Ship Comedy is your friendly neighbourhood comedy club featuring some of the finest comics from the UK circuit.

Harriet is an award winning comedian, writer and actress who has developed her scattiness into a powerhouse form of stand-up. Beneath her sweet exterior is a fierce comedy brain.

She has starred in the Viceland reality sitcom Bobby and Harriet: Get Married which she co-created and co-wrote with her ex-husband Bobby Mair, to huge critical acclaim. She has also appeared on Live at the Apollo, Dave's Hypothetical, Comedy Central's Roast Battle, and is a recurring guest on 8 out of 10 Cats.

You can purchase tickets (from £17) by searching 'Harriet Kemsley' on Eventbrite

WALK

West Essex Ramblers Linear Walk

Sunday, 18th January, 10.45am-1.30pm
Meet point: Wood Street Station, E17 3LX

Join West Essex Ramblers for a five-mile stroll from Wood Street Station to the Walthamstow Wetlands.

The walk will follow part of the Green Link Walk and it takes in the Coppermill Tower and the Engine Room, with café and a pub at the end.

MARKET

Walthamstow Flea Market

Sunday 18th January, 11am-5pm
Big Penny Social,
1 Priestley Way E17 6AL

Come hunt for personal treasures, bargains, and refresh your living space with unique unexpected flea finds at our Walthamstow Flea Market. With over 60 hand-picked flea and vintage traders, this will be the go-to destination to pick up vintage gems, and pre-loved artifacts. Expect furniture, reclaimed industrial fixtures, salvaged electrics/lighting, homewares, textiles, vintage clothes, curiosities and collectables, and unexpected oddities.

Book (£2) here: bigpennysocial.co.uk/whats-on/walthamstow-flea-market

VEGAN FOOD

Veganuary Fest 2026

Sat 26th January, 12pm-1am
Signature Brew Blackhorse Road, Blackhorse Ln, Unit 15 E17 5QJ

Join us this Veganuary for a full day of incredible plant-based food, great drinks, and good vibes as Signature Brew and Feed the Village bring Veganuary Fest to Walthamstow. Expect a vibrant celebration of East London's vegan scene with flavours from some of the city's most-loved traders. Food Traders include Feed the Village Burgers, Chickenish, Hogless Roast, Amrutha Indian, and Los Gordos Tacos. Whether you're a committed vegan, giving Veganuary a try, or simply a foodie looking to explore new flavours, this is the perfect way to spend your Saturday.

Book free tickets here: tixr.com/groups/signaturebrew/events

GONG BATH

Gong Bath Ceremony

Thurs, 22nd January, 8pm-9.15pm
Emmanuel Community Hall, 149 Hitcham Road E17 8HL

Some researchers call sound "the oldest non-chemical psychedelic". Many cultures used sound as the primary trance technology, for example drumming at four to seven hertz induces theta states (visionary, dreamlike); gongs, rattles, and didgeridoos create sensory saturation similar to psychedelic onset, repetition and volume can dissolve ego boundaries.

To have the best experience please do not try to visualise the instruments or Lucas playing them and please come with no expectations.

Book free tickets here: tixr.com/groups/signaturebrew/events

We can include low-cost community events taking place in Waltham Forest. For next month's listings, email the details of your event to wfecho@socialspider.com by Monday 19th January.

SPORT

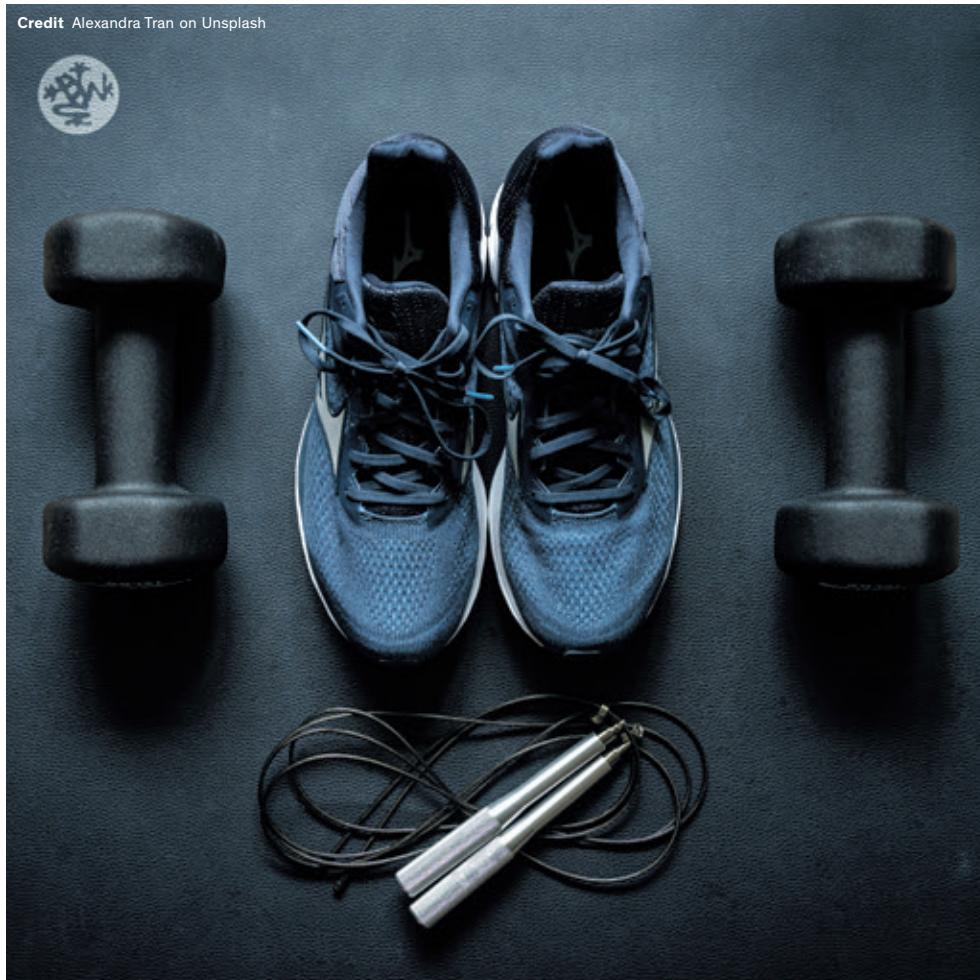
Moving with intention

The pressure to pick up weights and shed pounds as soon as it hits January can be overwhelming – Walthamstow sports therapist Loïc Lefevre says it doesn't have to be this way

After weeks of rich food, late nights, long meals and busy social calendars, it's common to feel heavier, stiffer and more fatigued than usual – and to start making plans to "get back on track" in the new year.

As a sports therapist based in Walthamstow, I'd like to offer a gentler perspective. Recovering from the festive period doesn't require punishment, extreme workouts or strict routines. What your body really needs is movement frequent, light and consistent to help it reset.

During the Christmas holidays, routines change. We sit more, eat differently, sleep more and move less. While rest is important, too much stillness can leave the body stiff and sluggish. When movement drops, circulation slows, joints lose lubrication, muscles tighten and fatigue builds. This is often why January begins with aches,



low energy and the feeling that the body needs "fixing".

Short, regular bouts of movement help restore circulation, support joint health

and gently reawaken muscles – making you feel better without pushing the body too hard.

January is famous for ambitious reso-

lutions: losing weight, exercising more, pushing harder. While well intentioned, these plans often fail when exercise becomes a form of punishment for festive excess. Movement shouldn't be simply about undoing December. It should be about reconnecting with your body and rebuilding consistency.

Instead of long gym sessions, think small and frequent. Micro-movements woven into your day are far more sustainable and often more effective for long-term health.

Here are some simple ideas to try: spend three to five minutes on gentle spinal twists, shoulder rolls or cat-cow stretches when you wake, while drinking coffee or watching the news. Take walking phone calls around the flat or outside. Use stairs instead of lifts, even if it's just a few flights.

Every 30 to 45 minutes, stand, march in place or gently sway side to side. Make errands more active by parking a little further away, carrying shopping manually or taking a longer route. In the evening, soften the hips and gently twist the spine before bed to ease residual tension.

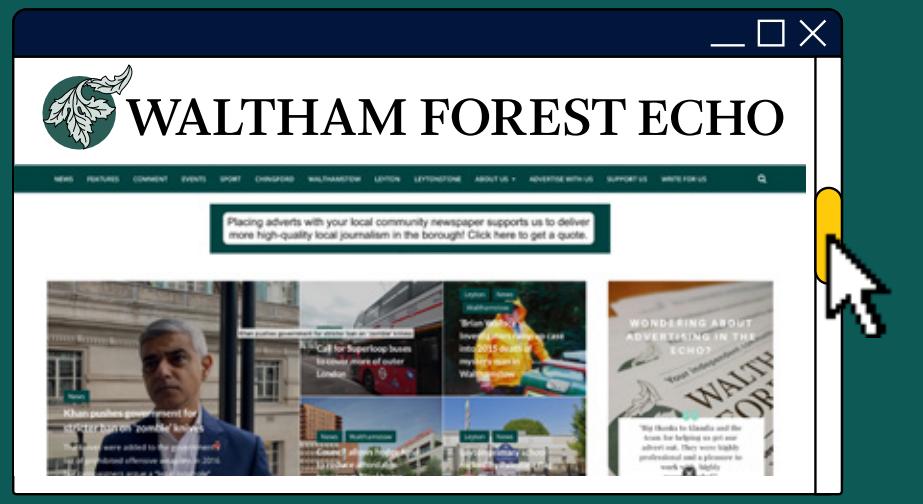
As you ease back into activity, preparation matters more than pressure. Warm up gently, change posture often, stay hydrated, prioritise sleep and listen to your body. Mild soreness is normal; sharp or lingering pain is not.

Movement is not something to earn or endure. It is a gift – a way to restore energy, build resilience and start the new year feeling ready rather than depleted.

Loïc Lefevre is a sports therapist at the Blue Door Clinic in Westbury Road, Walthamstow

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