



Your independent community newspaper

WALTHAM FOREST ECHO

Free
May 2026, N° 134

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David Gloria (centre) experienced physical and mental abuse from staff in Whitefield School
Credit: Noel Titheradge



Review into Whitefield School abuse hit by series of delays

by Marco Marcelline

A long awaited safeguarding review into historic abuse at Whitefield School in Walthamstow has been delayed again with the Waltham Forest Safeguarding Children Board now aiming for an “end of summer term” release.

The Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR), commissioned in August 2024, was legally expected to be completed within six months.

But emails shared with the *Echo* confirm that the original timeline for the review was extended in agreement with the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted to ensure a

“comprehensive examination of both current and historical matters and to ensure meaningful engagement with families”.

The most recent publication date for the review had been early March 2026. However, the *Echo* understands the review was pushed back again due to a need for additional specialist knowledge of SEND settings.

It is unclear why this specific need had not been identified or addressed earlier.

A number of pupils were subjected to physical and psychological abuse while placed in so-called “calming rooms” at the school between 2014 and 2017.

The calming rooms were

Continued on page 6

Nearly 300 candidates to stand for election this month

Voters in Waltham Forest will choose from 291 candidates on Thursday 7th May, with eight parties fielding hopefuls across the borough.

Both Labour and the Conservatives are running full slates of 60 candidates, according to nomination data submitted to the council.

The Greens are mounting their largest challenge ever, putting forward 53 candidates across a total of 20 wards.

The Liberal Democrats and Reform UK are also contesting widely with 45 and 42 candidates respectively.

A total of 31 independents and minor-party candidates are standing in this election.

The smaller parties fielding candidates include Trade Unionist Socialist Coalition (18) Waltham Forest Independent Socialists (two), and the Jeremy Corbyn-led Your Party (one).

The election will decide all 60 council seats, with Labour currently in control. No seats are uncontested.

Residents will be able go to the polls from 7am to 10pm on Thursday 7th May, and the final result is expected as and when counting concludes on Friday 8th May.



Read our interviews with the party leaders on pages 10-13

NEWS



FELLOWSHIP IS LIFE

MAY 2026
N° 134

Waltham Forest Echo is the borough's free community newspaper. We publish monthly and distribute 15,000 free copies of each issue

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Published on 24/04/26

Tories call for CPZ refunds

by Sebastian Mann, Local Democracy Reporter

New parking fines issued to motorists "should be refunded," the leader of the Waltham Forest Conservatives says.

Councillor Emma Best, leader of the opposition, has filed a formal complaint with Linzi Roberts-Egan, the chief executive of Waltham Forest Council.

She says the controlled parking zone (CPZ) policy, introduced to tackle pollution and congestion, only serves to make the council money.

CPZs restrict on-street parking during set times in order to prioritise residential parking and reduce the number of cars in an area.

The council has proposed several trial CPZs in the borough, arguing they will "secure expeditious, convenient and safe movement of vehicular and other traffic and the provision of suitable and adequate parking facilities on the highway".

They were introduced in



Waltham Forest alongside its wider mission to cut emissions and improve air quality in the borough, but Cllr Best claims there is a financial motivation.

"The dominant purpose for this scheme was to collect revenue rather than for any climate or health benefits to our residents," Cllr Best wrote.

"This is why the scheme was pushed ahead regardless of it going against the wishes of 90% of those consulted."

Council data from December showed its takings had

doubled under the scheme.

Between April and October 2024, the council collected £519,000 from pay-to-park bays. Between April and October the following year, it brought in £918,000.

"The council has misled the public and I believe this now makes them liable to refund all enforcement payments or purchased parking sessions," Cllr Best wrote in her letter, published simultaneously to social media.

The council declined to comment.

Youths detained over ambulance attack

Three young people from Waltham Forest have been remanded into custody after appearing in court charged with the arson of Jewish community ambulances in Golders Green in March.

Hamza Iqbal, 20, and Rehan Khan, 19, from Leyton, and a 17-year-old boy from Walthamstow are charged with one count of arson.

They appeared at a Westminster Magistrates Court hearing on Saturday 4th April where they did not enter any pleas.

Another suspect was arrested by the Metropolitan Police in connection with the alleged arson on Hatzola ambulances on Saturday morning.

The ambulances from Hatzola, a volunteer-led ambulance service operating in north-west London, were set on fire in the early hours of Monday 23rd March, causing gas canisters stored in the vehicles to explode.

The three defendants were due to appear at the Old Bailey on Friday, 24th April, after the *Echo* went to print.

Double murder charge

A man has been charged with double murder two years after two men died in what police say was a deliberately started fire at a squatted house in Walthamstow.

The blaze broke out at around 10.24pm on 21st April 2024 in a two-storey terraced home on Forest Road, directly opposite Waltham Forest Town Hall.

The victims, later identified as Mohammed Djellal, 24, and Faouzi Bouchadoue, 35, were found dead inside.

Last year, Metropolitan Police detectives authorised murder charges against Fouad Boudra, a 25-year-old Algerian national.

An international arrest warrant was issued and Boudra was arrested in France on 26th January before being extradited to the UK in March.

He appeared at Uxbridge Magistrates' Court on Saturday 4th April, charged with two counts of murder, two counts of manslaughter, causing grievous bodily harm with intent to a third man, and arson with intent to endanger life.

40 firefighters and six engines battled the blaze for almost two hours before bringing it under control, but the property was left completely destroyed.

You can read the full story at walthamforestecho.co.uk

School caterer fined £125k

Credit: Max Mustermann via Unsplash



A catering company serving pupils at a Walthamstow secondary school has been hit with more than £125,000 in fines and costs for food safety breaches.

An inspection by Waltham Forest Council's environmental health officers on 15th January 2024 that uncovered a mouse infestation at Willowfield School resulted in the kitchen's immediate closure

and a hefty fine for 'failing to put in place adequate procedures to control pests'.

The Pantry (UK) Limited – the company contracted to serve 500 meals per day to 200 pupils and staff at the Walthamstow school – pleaded guilty to all charges at Thames Magistrates Court at a hearing on Tuesday 31st March this year.

District Judge Holdham ordered the catering firm to pay a fine of £120,000 plus additional costs.

A council spokesperson said: "This significant fine serves as a reminder to school caterers across the borough that we will not tolerate failing food safety standards.

"Any operator deemed to be putting the health of students and teachers at risk here in Waltham Forest will have their operation shut down and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

You can check the food hygiene rating of any food business here: ratings.food.gov.uk

NEWS

'We naively thought the council would help us – not throw us out'



Blackhorse Road barbershop Timmy Tapers were given notice to leave a council-owned building in March

by Marco Marcelline

The owners of a barbershop in Blackhorse Lane say they “naively” thought Waltham Forest Council would keep them on as a long-term tenant.

Timmy Tapers Barbershop had initially shared a Lockwood Way warehouse with Wild Card Brewery until the boozer went into liquidation in October 2024. When the council repossessed the unit, a tenancy-at-will agreement was issued to allow the barbershop and a neighbouring bakery to remain in the space temporarily.

A tenancy-at-will agreement is a flexible, informal rental arrangement allowing a tenant to occupy property with the landlord’s consent without a fixed term or formal lease. It can be terminated immediately by either party at any time without notice, providing maximum flexibility but no security of tenure.

Despite the ad-hoc nature of the contract, Tim Cox and Lauren Hogg of Timmy Tapers say they were never told the council expected them to start looking

for a new site as soon as they signed it.

In March this year, prospective sub-landlord East London Brewing Company (ELBC) informed Tim and Lauren the HMRC would not grant the brewery operational approval if Timmy Tapers remained on site.

The *Echo* understands the HMRC’s concern related to Timmy Tapers customers being able to access the brewery floor and interventions to permanently block off public access between the two businesses were deemed cost-prohibitive.

Following this revelation, Tim contacted the council who said ELBC would not be taking Timmy Tapers on as a sub-tenant and they would need to be out of the building by Tuesday, 31st March.

Speaking to the *Echo*, ELBC director Ronnie Finch rejected Timmy Tapers’ description of the events as an “eviction”, saying: “That assertion is incorrect. There is no security of tenure in a tenancy at will agreement, and Timmy Tapers was generously given far more time than

necessary by Waltham Forest to vacate the premises given there is no minimum notice period legally required when ending this type of agreement.”

Ronnie added: “They would have known the arrangement was short term, and perhaps in advance looking for a new premises under the circumstances would have been prudent. The council is not at fault here - they

did everything they could have.”

In correspondence to council officials seen by the *Echo*, Tim and Lauren say the events had left “a family with a small child, another due in three months’ time, without a stable income”.

They add: “We were under the impression that our occupation would be formalised or ‘absorbed’ under any new head-lease arrangement. Had we been informed that our tenure was at the sole discretion of ELBC, we would have initiated a search for new premises months ago.”

Asked if they had placed too much faith in the council to go above and beyond what the terms of their contact stipulated – given they had no security of tenure – Lauren said: “Yes, I guess you can call us naive. But we’d paid nearly £21,000 in rent to the council over the years; we honestly thought they would treat us better.”

Council deputy leader Ahsan Khan said the council had ensured the barbershop “did not have to immediately vacate” after Wild Card’s collapse and that they had time “from October 2024 to seek a longer-term home”.

One month after moving out of Lockwood Way, Lauren says she and Tim are still searching for a new location for Timmy Tapers.



Three music festivals set for Leyton Jubilee Park in May

Three live music events will be held in Leyton Jubilee Park over the end of May bank holiday weekend.

Kicking proceedings off on Friday 22nd May is Boa Nova, a festival celebrating contemporary Brazilian music.

Billed as the UK’s first multi-stage outdoor festival dedicated entirely to Brazilian artists, the line-up includes João Gomes, Mari Froes, Liniker, A Música de Tim Maia, D. Vyzor, Caio Prince, th4ys, Bronka, DJ Patife and Mango & Ginger, representing a range of current Brazilian genres.

The event will also feature Brazilian food stalls, including vendors specialising in churrasco, alongside other regional dishes.

Boa Nova forms part of a year-long cultural exchange organised by the British Council and Brazil’s Instituto Guimarães Rosa.

Saturday 23rd May sees the “first ever house music festival created for the over-25 raving community in East London”. Featuring deep, soulful house, Forward Motion will be set across two stages in the park.

Finishing things off on Sunday 24th are melodic trance DJs Argy and ARTBAT, who go head-to-head for a UK exclusive special extended set.

All three festivals will start at 12pm and finish by 10.30pm.

Residents in Waltham Forest, you can enjoy a special discounted ticket price of £35 on up to two tickets per festival. There are a limited number of discounted tickets available and these are on a first-come, first-served basis.

Residents who live in a close proximity to Leyton Jubilee Park may also be eligible for free tickets.

You can sign up for tickets here:
leytonjubilee.elixarevents.com

NEWS



A glimpse inside V&A East Museum's inaugural exhibition, 'The Music is Black: A British Story'. The five-storey museum, part of the East Bank development in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, opened on Saturday 18th April. Credit David Parry for the V&A

Former Walthamstow maternity hospital sold to Aldi

The retailer has taken control of the Thorpe Coombe Hospital in Forest Road through a deal with North East London NHS Foundation Trust

by Marco Marcelline

Aldi has reportedly purchased the former Thorpe Coombe Hospital site in Forest Road, Walthamstow, from North East London NHS Foundation Trust (NELFT).

According to property filings seen by *CityAM*, the food retailer has signed a mortgage agreement to take over the former hospital, which has sat empty since 2017.

Aldi's plans for the site are not yet public, and no planning application has been submitted to the council yet.

CityAM reported that Aldi plans to build a supermarket in and around the 80-space car park to the ex-hospital's rear, while keeping the main building in Forest Road intact.

Aldi often buys freehold sites, including brownfield land and town-centre plots, before partnering with developers to include residential units alongside new stores.

In 2020, Aldi received approval for a scheme in Old Kent Road, Southwark, involving 170 new homes across two towers (14 and 21 storeys) on a 1.1-acre freehold site that also includes a new flagship Aldi store.

The *Echo* has asked Aldi whether it intends to retain, convert or demolish any of the remaining structures as part of its redevelopment plans.

The reported transaction follows a long period of stalled and only partial redevelopment of the site. Planning permission for

91 homes – approved in 2016 without affordable housing – did not come into fruition, with NELFT instead completing a new health and wellbeing facility, the Jane Atkinson Centre in 2019, before putting the remainder of the site up for sale.

A 2020 sales brochure prepared for NELFT by consultants Montagu Evans described the site as “a fantastic residential development opportunity”.

The brochure made clear that the trust intended to dispose of the land “freehold with vacant

possession”, and bids were invited by October 2020.

Waltham Forest Council's updated Local Plan, released in 2024, designates the hospital as a future site for 100 new homes, with workspace, community or cultural uses, and an added requirement for developers to “preserve or enhance the significance, setting and key views” of the Grade-2 listed building.

The Local Plan also calls for improved east-west pedestrian and cycling links and “enhanced greening and biodiversity”.

Thorpe Coombe Hospital's history stretches back more than 200 years.

Built in the early 19th Century as a private mansion for Octavius Wigram, a former governor of British insurer the Royal Exchange Assurance Corporation, in 1934 it became a maternity hospital before subsequently being used as a nurses' home from 1973. It eventually became a mental health facility until it was shut in 2017.



The former Thorpe Coombe Hospital in Forest Road as it stands today Credit Google Streetview

The Regal Cinema in Hale End Road pictured before works began



Independent filmhouse reveals bid to run Highams Park cinema

by Marco Marcelline

The independent filmhouse Castle Cinema has confirmed it has submitted a bid to run the new two-screen cinema planned to open late next year in Highams Park.

In a public statement, the operator said it had been in discussions with Regal Cinema developer Mammoth Capital about “bringing [its] passion for community cinema” to the venue.

The Regal, in Hale End Road, is currently being rebuilt into 33 flats, a café bar and a restored Art-Deco cinema frontage. Construction began in early 2026 and is on track to finish in autumn 2027, according to Waltham Forest Council. Two 80 to 90 seat screens are planned, with opening hours from 8am to midnight.

The *Echo* understands that Castle Cinema is among a number of cinema operators that have expressed interest in running the screens when they open. Mammoth Capital is however yet to finalise and agree a lease with an operator.

Castle Cinema said: “With the recent news that the building's redevelopment is on track for Autumn 2027, our inbox has been overflowing with residents asking if we'll be involved, we can confirm that we would absolutely love to join the Highams Park community, and we've submitted a bid to operate the cinema.

“Our vision is to bring the same community spirit, curated film programme, and welcoming bar space that we pride ourselves on in Hackney.

“The selection process is ongoing, and whilst we are incredibly hopeful we know these things take time.”

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NEWS

Revealed: Waltham Forest pension fund invests in US gas field expansion

Waltham Forest's Pension Fund has a £4m stake in a fund that paid \$5bn for the construction of a sprawling natural gas complex in Texas

by Josephine Moulds & Simon Lock, with additional reporting by Marco Marcelline

Waltham Forest pension savers are unwittingly bankrolling the rapid expansion of US gas terminals, despite the council's divestment from fossil fuel companies.

In 2016, Waltham Forest became the first local authority to commit to pulling its pension fund investments from all fossil fuel companies. It remains the only council to achieve this.

But that divestment process, which saw Waltham Forest pull £53.4million of oil, gas and coal stocks, now appears to be in question.

Revelations by the *Bureau of Investigative Journalism* show the Waltham Forest Pension Fund invested in a fund that paid \$5billion towards the construction of Rio Grande LNG, a sprawling liquefied



Credit Arvind Vallabh via Unsplash

natural gas complex right next to the Mexican border.

The Rio Grande LNG project was able to proceed thanks to a \$5bn commitment from GIP Fund V – which is supported by nearly £200m of UK savers' pensions, from Waltham Forest to Greater Manchester.

Council reports show that the Waltham Forest Pension Fund invested £4m in GIP Fund V in 2025, with the council holding more than £28m in GIP-managed infrastructure investments overall.

The *Echo* understands that GIP Fund V

has a minimum 46.12% economic interest in Rio Grande LNG, making it one of the primary financiers of the gas field.

The council's £4m investment was made outside the London Collective Investment Vehicle (LCIV) – the pooled body that manages most pension assets for all 32 London boroughs.

Waltham Forest declined to comment when approached by the *Bureau*.

Charlie Loveday, Green candidate for Wood Street ward, told the *Echo*: "These revelations that Waltham Forest's pensions are still invested in dirty fossil fuels are

shocking. Residents were told the council's public pension fund was no longer invested in oil and gas, yet this investigation has exposed the gap between what Labour say they're doing on climate and the reality.

"What we need is complete transparency over how residents' and council workers' money is invested to ensure there are no more links to fossil fuels or human rights abuses."

The environmental group Sierra Club warns the Rio Grande gas complex will give rise to the same level of emissions of 50 coal-fired power plants every year, while campaigners say the project is already contributing to habitat loss in an area critical for ocelots, falcons and sea turtles.

When it comes to curbing carbon emissions, council pension funds and campaigners have tended to focus on selling their shares in companies like BP and Shell. But a growing portion of pension funds are invested in so-called "private markets". Typically this involves putting money into a number of big funds, which in turn invest in everything from private equity to property to company loans.

Private markets can offer healthy returns but tracking where the money ends up can be difficult, and they're often excluded from the scope of council climate commitments.

You can read the full version of this article at walthamforestecho.co.uk

'Growing frustration as Whitefield School review delayed again'

Continued from page 1

closed in 2017 following an Ofsted inspection, and allegations first emerged publicly in 2021 when secret CCTV footage was discovered by new leadership at the school.

A BBC investigation into the abuse revealed that pupils were left alone in the window-less calming rooms for up to four hours at a time, sitting in urine, and were eating crumbs off the floor.

The footage also shows children, many who were non-verbal, kicked and hit with force by staff.

No-one who worked at the school during the abuse has been prosecuted or arrested. Six staff were proven to have abused children but were not sacked, and at least one referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) was recommended but not made.

The DfE did not respond to repeated requests for comment about the delay.

Meanwhile, the *Echo* also understands that 26 Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) referrals relating to Whitefield staff were made between 2016 and 2021.

These referrals were not all linked to the use of the calming rooms. LADO referrals regard the formal reporting of concerns about an adult working with children who may have harmed a child.

However, the town hall was unable to provide any data of referrals made between 2014 and 2016 due to the way reports were recorded at the time. This is despite abuse taking place in this period.

The lack of a review has fuelled growing frustration among families whose children were affected.

Parents previously spoke to the *Echo* about their anger that no staff had been arrested despite the existence of footage that showed physical and mental abuse taking place in the calming rooms.

Ricardo Gloria's son David was abused



Ricardo Gloria and son David

in the calming rooms a number of times between 2013 and March 2015.

CCTV footage revealed that his son was left to urinate twice on the floor, and was refused water. It also showed three members of staff restraining David by putting their knees on his neck as he was lying on the floor.

Speaking in April, Ricardo said: "I feel let down by several parties in this investigation. Whitefield School took too long to protect vulnerable children, and the local authority has shown a lack of accountability.

"The extended delays have been frustrating and have hindered justice for the children who suffered unfair treatment at Whitefield School over the years. To be honest, I have little hope for a positive outcome from the review, but I sincerely hope to be proven wrong. It is crucial that some form of justice and a rehabilitation plan are established for the victims and their families."

A spokesperson for the Waltham Forest Safeguarding Children Board said: "This is not a typical review, and as such it requires a more considered, phased approach. The board has therefore appointed someone with in-depth knowledge of SEND settings to help finalise the review. This will help achieve the partnership's goal of ensuring the lessons of the case are properly identified and taken on board to support best practice."

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NEWS

Council rejects bid for 24/7 gambling venue in Walthamstow

by Sebastian Mann, Local Democracy Reporter

A controversial application for a new gambling shop in Walthamstow has been rejected by Waltham Forest Council.

Merkur Slots had sought permission for a new venue in Hoe Street at a licensing hearing last month.

The gambling sub-committee, made up of three elected Waltham Forest councillors, refused the proposals on the third day of deliberations.

It raised serious concerns about the proposed 24-hour opening times and said it was “not convinced” by Merkur Slots’ argument that most people visiting shops in the early hours were hospitality workers unwinding after their shifts.

In its reasoning, the sub-committee said it “appreciated that the applicant had many procedures and policies in place, however, based on the evidence at the hearing they do not believe these would

mitigate the harm to vulnerable people and children”.

There is deprivation locally and the area around the venue is used by high numbers of children and young persons, the committee said.

It also pointed to the combined 59 people who had excluded themselves from Merkur Slots’ Leytonstone and Chingford branches.

The committee said this was evidence “vulnerable persons have voluntarily recognised that they are being harmed by gambling”.

Several representatives for Merkur Slots attended, including a barrister with experience in licensing, and the company submitted a 381-page bundle of evidence to the committee.

The company operates more than 230 venues across the UK and has never been refused a licence before.

They argued gambling was no different than other leisure activities – such as drinking alcohol or “using social media” – and was enjoyed by “many, many” people safely



and lawfully. The harms were mitigated by heavy regulation, they added.

Merkur Slots had applied to convert 220 Hoe Street into an adult gaming centre. Citizens Advice Bureau vacated the premises when they moved to Walthamstow High Street last year.

Six objections were lodged against the scheme and seven people attended the meeting to speak against it, including councillors, residents and public health officers.

In their review, the committee said they were “very concerned

that due to the low footfall the customers were spending a lot of their money once in the [adult gaming centres]”.

The committee also heard from Fiona Holden, a resident who lives directly above the premises and did not want to see the application go ahead.

She said police were called to the area “once a month already” and it was plagued by “a lot of noise disturbance”.

During their objections, council officers stressed there was “no moral opposition” to gambling and their concerns were rooted in licensing law.

Town hall to purchase 81 unsold apartments in Fellowship Square

by Sebastian Mann, Local Democracy Reporter

Waltham Forest Council is to buy 81 homes and turn them into “affordable housing” after they struggled to be sold.

The homes form part of Hepworth Place, a 433-strong development surrounding the town hall in Walthamstow.

In November last year, Waltham Forest negotiated with its development partner Countryside Partnerships to remarket the planned redevelopment of Willow House, part of Hepworth Place, from 50% affordable housing to 100% build-to-rent.

As a result, the affordable

homes previously allocated for Willow House were moved to a different block in Hepworth Place in order to keep the level of affordable housing in the redevelopment project unchanged.

Affordable housing is defined as homes aimed at people who cannot afford the current

market rate. Types of affordable housing include shared ownership, intermediate rent and social rent.

However, Countryside Partnerships received “no viable offers” from registered housing providers for the 50 homes in the block over a six-month

period, apart from “firm interest” from an unnamed London borough council.

The lack of viable offers means Waltham Forest has put in an offer of its own, and the proposals were signed off by top councillors at a cabinet meeting last month.

The council’s housing department says the move will “protect and expedite” the delivery of affordable housing at Fellowship Square, increasing the share from 50% to 67%.

It will also increase the council’s supply of social housing, which it says will reduce the financial pressure of temporary accommodation – one of the biggest financial burdens on the council – by around £1million.



Row erupts over ‘purdah breaching’ resident survey

by Marco Marcelline

Conservative councillors have accused Waltham Forest Council of breaching strict pre-election rules after contractors carrying out the borough’s annual Resident Insight Survey (RIS) were seen knocking on doors in Endlebury during the purdah period.

Purdah refers to the pre-election period of sensitivity five to six weeks before the election when councils are banned from making announcements or decisions that could influence voters.

MEL Research Ltd was commissioned by the council to run the RIS, which gathers residents’ views on Waltham Forest services. Fieldwork began on Monday, 23rd February and ran until late April.

The questionnaire also covered topics such as community cohesion, crime, health, cost of living and housing. It did not mention political parties or elected representatives.

Waltham Forest Tory leader Emma Best, wrote to the council’s chief executive Linzi Roberts-Egan and the corporate director of governance Mark Hynes on Friday, 3rd April, saying she believed officers were “literally canvassing” by asking residents questions about the council during an election period.

Pointing to the first line of the survey’s introductory letter posted to residents – which states the council is “committed to providing the most relevant and highest quality public services” – she said the RIS constituted “political messaging”.

She also said the questionnaire itself “suggests policy areas that voters should consider”.

Emails seen by the *Echo* show Hynes rejecting Cllr Best’s view that contractors were canvassing, adding that the RIS is a “long-running, business-as-usual activity” that does not breach purdah.

He wrote: “This activity does not breach pre-election publicity rules. There is no mention of any councillor or political party in the survey. The activity cannot reasonably be interpreted as contravening Sections 2 and 6 of the Local Government Act 1986.”

Chief Executive Linzi Roberts-Egan backed his position, saying the council’s stance was “clear” and that the RIS would continue.

The full version of this article can be found at walthamforestecho.co.uk

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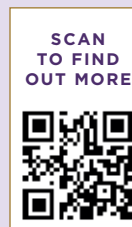
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ELECTION 2026



‘We’re proud of our track record in the town hall’

Promising continued investments in education, children’s services, affordable housing, leisure centres and cultural venues, Waltham Forest Council leader Grace Williams says Labour is the right choice for voters on Thursday, 7th May

by Marco Marcelline

As voters prepare to go to the polls, Waltham Forest Council leader Grace Williams is asking that Labour be given another run at the town hall based on the party’s “track record” and its “grown-up plan” for the borough.

Speaking to the *Echo*, Cllr Williams, who has been council leader since 2021, said the borough has changed significantly since Labour first gained majority control in 2010. “If you look back to how the council was before 2010, it was a different place. Residents will often say to me on the doorstep that nothing happened, there wasn’t new housing being built, everything was a bit forgotten. But more seriously, we had really poor services.”

Which Labour achievements is she most proud of? Listing investments in education, children’s services, leisure centres and cultural venues, one of the examples she returns to is the William Morris Gallery. “People forget that in 2012 the gallery was going to close and the park was in a terrible state. The Labour council got a really large Heritage Lottery Fund grant and transformed the park and the gallery. It’s a really good example of what we’ve done in the borough.”

Soho Theatre Walthamstow, the forthcoming Regal cinema in Highams Park, and the redevelopment of Fellowship Square are, she argues, further examples of Labour successes.

“We have a manifesto, we have a plan, and it’s a grown-up plan,” she declares. “It’s within the budget we’ve got, working with the situation we’ve got. It’s highly focused on the fact that we still have such systematic inequalities in our borough, which we’re determined to address.”

Cllr Williams also uses the council’s closer partnership with the voluntary sector since the pandemic as an example of things Labour has got right. “We learned a lot from our community and voluntary sector,” she says. “Through working together, we’ve been able to build amazing pieces of work. Our cost-of-living programme, community living rooms, and Waltham Forest Max – the offer that



Waltham Forest Labour candidates with council leader Grace Williams (front centre) Credit Waltham Forest Labour

anyone can have going into any library to get help and support – all came from that partnership.”

But she acknowledges that not everything has gone smoothly. The original plan for the Walthamstow Mall redevelopment, which would have removed mature lime trees, was a move she regards as a mistake. “People weren’t very pleased about that,” she admits. “So we worked to change the plans and make sure those lime trees, which are really loved, were protected.”

Further unpopular decisions taken by her administration have included the closure of a day centre for adults with special needs, the scrapping of weekly bin collections, and the end of free 15-minute parking in the borough.

Critics say the abolition of free 15-minute parking has hit Chingford particularly hard relative to other high streets because it is an area with proportionately more car owners.

Cllr Williams doesn’t express any regret for the move, however, saying: “We need to reduce the car journeys that people are making to their town centres. Most people can walk, many people can cycle, most people can get a bus.

“We know that if people come to their town centre on foot, they spend more money because they spend more time there.”

There’s an elephant in the room; namely Waltham Forest’s recent £19m emergency bailout request to the government.

It’s a decision that was seized on by the Tory opposition as evidence of financial mismanagement and the council using taxpayer money like a “credit card”. Cllr Williams however retorts that she is “really confident that we’ve done everything we can every step of the way” to manage finances amid “chronic underfunding”.

She adds the council has been “honest” about the pressures it faces. “We’ve been saying for a number of years that we would need additional support. We’ve been working hard and lobbying for our residents for fairer funding. Some of that is starting to improve, but you can’t fix things like this overnight.”

She explains the borough loses out because it is classified as an “out-of-London” authority for funding purposes. “Teachers in the borough are paid less than teachers in neighbouring boroughs. Our public health funding is much lower than the other boroughs in the ICB

[Integrated Care Board]. These are things we need a fair settlement on.”

She says Labour will continue pushing for the Whipps Cross Hospital rebuild to be brought forward. “I was very devastated by the news that it wasn’t going ahead until 2032. We had one of the clearest cases in terms of need. Now we need to keep focused on how we keep de-risking the project to make sure there’s nothing standing in its way.”

With the Green Party’s surge in the polls seriously threatening Labour hegemony, Cllr Williams is urging residents to “think about who you want to run your services”. She says: “Ask the question: what do they stand for? What have they said about protecting services? What have they said about actually building affordable homes?”

And she ruling out a coalition with the Greens. “We can’t do coalitions,” she says. “We stand for the voters that elect us. There are many things we can work cross-party on, but that’s not how we work.”

Asked if she felt confident about Labour’s chances of winning again in May, Cllr Williams notably opted for a more measured response: “People talk to me about moving here and loving the borough. They say they love the parks, they love the low-traffic neighbourhoods, they love the culture. But nationally, people have had a tough 15 years. They want to make sure we have stable leadership, but they also want to make sure they feel better... we will provide that leadership.”

Factsheet

Number of candidates standing: 60
Number of current councillors: 44

Manifesto:

- Build 1,000 new homes with over half affordable
- Expand CCTV and crack down harder on fly-tipping
- Repair roads faster and tackle dangerous driving
- Invest in parks, playgrounds and green spaces
- Support residents with cost-of-living help through Waltham Forest Max
- Deliver new NHS Health Hubs in St James, Lea Bridge and Leyton
- Work with the government to deliver leasehold reform, including a cap on ground rents
- Protect renters through landlord licensing and new social homes
- Back local businesses with long-term high street investment
- Improve safety with more youth spaces and safer routes to school

ELECTION 2026



‘We want a town hall that listens and leads with integrity’

An insurgent Green Party is pledging to protect green spaces, build genuinely affordable housing, and involve residents as much as possible in decision-making

by Marco Marcelline

Green Party candidates, Anna Rose Kerr in St James, Eva Tabbasam in Cann Hall, and Paul Perkins in Forest, are hoping to turn rising interest in their party into seats at the town hall.

All three say they are standing because they believe the council is “failing residents on the basics”.

For Anna Rose Kerr, the motivation to run for election comes from her work with young people. “I know young people who are in council care who have just been completely neglected,” she says.

“This is an amazing place for toddlers, but the minute someone becomes a teenager it feels like they’re policed, they’re waiting for housing for years, and they’re not considered part of our community.” She wants to act as a “corporate parent” who ensures teenagers “have a voice in the future” and grow up “loving living in Waltham Forest”.

Paul Perkins, standing in Forest and serving as the party’s co-chair, says his decision to run came after struggling to get responses from sitting councillors about broken playground equipment and a mothballed pavilion in Abbots Park. “After my ninth email, I didn’t get a response,” he said. “It was a case of saying, well, if not them, then why not me?”

Meanwhile, Eva Tabbasam, a Green candidate in Cann Hall, says her experience



The Green Party is standing a total of 53 candidates this year Credit Jonathan Perugia / Gaia Visual

of homelessness and temporary accommodation shaped her decision to stand. “I’ve grown up in social housing, been homeless, been in B&Bs,” she explains. “Family members and friends are in temporary housing and the way they’ve been treated by the council is disgusting and really inhumane.” She adds that she wants to challenge what she sees as a lack of empathy in decision-making.

Our interview takes place in the context of a recent YouGov poll that placed the Greens as the most popular party with voters in London. National party membership has quadrupled since Zack Polanski became leader, with Perkins saying that Polanski has helped articulate “positivity” at a time when “opposition parties have been quite negative”. He adds: “People want to be part of that.”

On the doorstep, Tabbasam said she hears from “really disillusioned Labour voters” who feel “taken for granted”. Others are so fed up they are considering not voting at all. “They don’t feel listened to,” she says. “So we break it down, we find out what the issues are – usually housing, neglected repairs, overcrowding, bins - and then they feel there’s a bit of hope.”

Perkins says Palestine is a major issue raised in Forest ward, alongside concerns about the state of roads and services. “A very large number of people comment

on pavements from an accessibility perspective; anybody should be able to go to their local shop.” Residents also feel decisions on traffic and cycling schemes are made “without asking how it’s going to work in this particular neighbourhood”.

The Greens’ manifesto centres on five pledges: affordable housing, “getting the basics right”, making Waltham Forest “a great place to grow up”, protecting green spaces, and creating a council that “listens and leads with integrity”.

On housing, Tabbasam says the party wants “accountability and transparency about contracts and relationships with developers”. She criticised the borough’s definition of affordability, saying shared ownership “is not accessible for quite a lot of people”, and opines that council temporary accommodation failures are “the norm”, citing a family of five left waiting in their car for hours after eviction.

Perkins adds that viability assessments used by developers to reduce affordable housing requirements are “super problematic because it’s marking their own homework”.

On day-to-day services, Kerr says the priority is “getting the basics right”, from bins to repairs. “Bins are such a big issue,” Tabbasam adds. “We went from weekly to every two weeks – that hasn’t made our places cleaner. We have more rubbish everywhere, more vermin.”

Meanwhile, Perkins wants a “public scorecard” so residents can see how quickly issues like fly-tipping or broken equipment are resolved.

Amid the doom and gloom, they also acknowledge areas where the council has succeeded. Kerr praised tree-planting and flower schemes, while Tabbasam pointed to recent playground improvements such as Drapers Field. Perkins says “big shiny investments” in Walthamstow, including cultural venues, have helped “give a sense of stuff happening” in the borough.

On active travel, all three support bringing dockless hire bikes to Waltham Forest, but only with proper consultation. “We’d like to see it done right and with residents,” says Perkins.

Deeper resident involvement is evidently a key theme for the Greens. Tabbasam says consultation should be “institutionalised and embedded”, not “ad hoc”. Kerr said her day job as a creative practitioner focuses on “imagining collective better futures” and she wants to bring that approach into local government, and Perkins says the party wants a standing citizens’ assembly.

All three say they are optimistic of the Greens’ chances. Kerr is “personally very confident”, noting her party came within 463 votes of winning St James last time, while a “hopeful” Perkins says that the biggest challenge is convincing residents that the Greens are not a wasted vote.

Factsheet

Number of candidates standing: 53

Number of current councillors: 0

Manifesto:

- Involving residents in housing decisions and put the needs of the community – rather than developers – first
- Prioritising local businesses to supply council services
- Regular street cleaning, properly fixed potholes and better lighting
- Redesign adult social care everyone knows what they’re entitled to
- Introduce a Right to Nature so everyone is a short, safe walk from somewhere green
- Nature and wild spaces improved by restoring habitats and creating wildlife corridors
- Explore dockless biking solutions with local residents
- Speak loudly against injustice at home and abroad



Green candidates Anna Rose Kerr (St James), Eva Tabbasam (Cann Hall), and Paul Perkins (Forest) Credit Jamie Woolley

ELECTION 2026



‘Hands off Chingford’

Waltham Forest Conservatives leader Emma Best says her party’s ten-point “contract” with residents would rein in “wasteful” town-hall spending, restore free 15-minute parking and prioritise building homes for families not investors

by **Sebastian Mann**, Local Democracy Reporter

The Tories are running on a ten-point plan – which they call a “contract” with residents – largely focused on cutting “wasteful” spending in the town hall and restoring the free 15 minutes of parking in the borough.

They say its removal last year harmed local businesses as shoppers are unwilling to pay just to nip to the shops.

The party also wants to bring back weekly black bin collections, stop low-traffic neighbourhood projects in favour of fixing roads and pavements, “protect our libraries”, and invest in mobile CCTV cameras for every ward to fight antisocial behaviour and fly-tipping.

Councillor Emma Best is the leader of the Waltham Forest Conservatives and the council’s current leader of the opposition.

She told the Local Democracy Reporting Service a Conservative council would also freeze council tax to “keep more money in [residents’] pocket”.

Council tax has risen by the maximum of 4.99% each year, though the council says it is facing a “severe” financial crisis as a result of chronic underfunding over the past 15 years.

The crisis has been exemplified by the town hall borrowing £19million from the government to balance its budget this year, which the Labour leadership says would prevent any further debts mounting. The Tories have characterised this as using the “taxpayers’ credit card” and Cllr Best has warned councillors about “shouldering massive debts” as a result.

Cllr Best says the Tories would tackle these rising costs by cutting spending on contracted consultants and better managing projects that have “overflowed”,



Endlebury councillor and Tory leader Emma Best Credit Waltham Forest Conservatives

such as the new Soho Theatre, which ended up costing £30m – around £11m over budget.

There are more than 120 members of staff at the council being paid six-figure salaries, she says, and the Tories would look to reduce these positions and slim down the number of civil servants in a further effort to rein in spending.

The north of the borough – mainly Chingford – has long been a Tory stronghold and she says this is still the case, despite the rise of Reform as a right-wing alternative.

She agreed it will not be a “two-horse race,” adding: “One of the things coming through in Chingford is support for the independents from former Labour voters.

“The battle in the borough between Labour and Greens will be very interesting.

“There was a poll that suggested Labour could not return a single seat and Greens would win them all – which I don’t think will happen at all – but it’s interesting that any model could even show that.

“Whereas other parties are coming into play in Waltham

Forest, I think in Chingford it remains a contest between us and Labour.”

She added: “Who knows what’s going to happen?”

“Some polls show that we could win Highams Park because the votes could end up being split five ways.”

Though the Conservatives are not currently anticipating a total victory in the borough, Cllr Best says the results could end up strengthening their position as the official opposition in Waltham Forest.

“We feel quite strongly, for the first time in a long, long time in this borough, that we could hold any power,” she said.

“We could see the Greens and Labour unable to form an overall majority. That’s why we really need a strong block of Conservatives so that, if the time does come, we can make our demands clear.

“And the demands will be: ‘Hands off Chingford’ and give us what we want. That is free parking, an equal share of policing, and new-builds for families to live in, not for investors [to buy].”

Factsheet

Number of candidates standing: 60
Number of current councillors: 10

Manifesto:

- Restore 15 minutes free parking
- Return to weekly black bin collection and provide big bins
- Build beautiful liveable homes for local people and oppose rabbit hutch development designed for investors
- Never put party before our residents’ needs
- Stop low traffic neighbourhood projects and fix our roads and pavements instead
- Protect our libraries and invest in community spaces
- Invest in mobile CCTV for every ward to fight antisocial behaviour and fly-tipping
- Cut Labour’s wasteful spending
- Get Chingford & Highams Park a fair share of the borough’s police resources
- Freeze council tax and keep more money in your pocket



Chingford and Woodford Green Community Independents candidates Credit CWGCI

‘Fighting for the people’

There are a plethora of independents and minor parties standing in this election, with the vast majority running on staunchly left-wing platforms

by **Marco Marcelline**

A total of 31 independents and minor-party candidates from Trade Unionist Socialist Coalition (TUSC), the Waltham Forest Independent Socialists, and Chingford & Woodford Green Community Independents are standing in this election, alongside a single candidate from the Jeremy Corbyn led Your Party.

A total of 18 TUSC candidates are standing on a platform focused on “opposing cuts, defending public services, expanding council housing and challenging private profiteering in housing and local services”.

Their slate includes trade unionists, campaigners and community activists involved in workplace disputes and anti-eviction campaigns. They argue that workers need an alternative to mainstream parties and say they will use elected positions to “support strikes, insourcing and community-led campaigns”.

Two candidates representing the Waltham Forest Independent Socialists are standing in Cathall.

They call for more affordable council housing, stronger landlord regulation, resisting the far right, environmental protections, and full divestment from companies linked

to human rights abuses. Candidates also say they would donate their councillor allowances to community causes.

Meanwhile, a new independent community group backed by the former Labour politician Faiza Shaheen is also in the picture.

Chingford & Woodford Green Community Independents (CWGCI) will stand in Larkwood and Valley wards, where the Greens are standing aside for them.

The group’s pledges include “the improvement of youth safety and local services, holding developers to account, pushing for the reopening of the Broadmead Road bridge and South Woodford Library and Gym, the development of a community plan for South Chingford, and the creation of People’s Assemblies”.

MD Shoeb Khan is the sole candidate representing Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana’s Your Party, and he is up for election in Hoe Street.

Your Party’s stated election platform is to “build a real alternative, a politics rooted in and accountable to communities, not billionaires and the professional political class”.

Your Party councillors, if elected, pledge to “campaign against cuts, stand up for public services and council housing, and advocate for full divestment from Israeli apartheid”.

ELECTION 2026



‘There’s finally an alternative on the right’

Reform UK candidate Matt Davis says his party is looking to undo “decades of Labour failing” and run the borough in the “best interest” of residents

by Sebastian Mann,
Local Democracy Reporter

Last month, Reform UK launched its local elections campaign with the slogan “Get Starmer Out”, in reference to Labour prime minister Keir Starmer.

And the party wants to push Labour out of Waltham Forest too.

Matt Davis is one of Reform’s candidates standing in Chingford Green ward.

He told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “Everyone in Waltham Forest must understand what a Labour council looks like because it’s all they’ve ever had,” he said.

“People need to ask themselves: is this how we want to continue?”

“Money can be found for this if the will exists, and in Waltham Forest it doesn’t,” he said.

He says the party will work to undo

“decades of Labour failing to run the borough in the best interest of residents,” pointing to “high council tax” and perceived failures to “address serious issues” such as the Whitefield School abuse scandal, the inquiry into which has been marred by delays.

The party will also work to fix roads and pavements to benefit motorists, cyclists and pedestrians and restore weekly black bin collections – policies both put forward by the Conservatives as well.

“Residents everywhere are complaining about the [bi-weekly collections] and they’re right to,” he said.

“The Conservatives could have prevented this but they didn’t. They don’t seem able to work with the council to get good things for the borough.

“Reform councillors will work with anybody to make things better. It’s a lot more important than [social media posts].”



Chingford Green and Reform UK candidate Matt Davis

He added that opposition councillors should oppose policies but “not to the detriment of residents”.

Support for Reform is “principally” in the north of the borough, Davis said, based on party data.

“What we do have here, possibly for the first time ever in Waltham Forest, is we have an opportunity for people fed up with the uniparty of Conservative-Labour to vote elsewhere.”

Reform will also push to restore the free 15-minute parking slots in the borough, which were controversially scrapped last year.

“You can talk to shopkeepers in Station Road [in Chingford] and they will tell you that since the free parking went, their footfall is lower,” he said.

Davis also attacked the “extremely large salaries” paid to top executives in the council, which he said “needed questioning”.

The council’s wage bill has ballooned since 2021, and Davis pointed to the chief executive’s £238,411 salary as an example of what Reform believes is exorbitant spending.

He added that his criticisms were “no reflection” of the chief executive but the decisions made by the council’s elected cabinet, which Reform hopes to replace.

Factsheet

Number of candidates standing: 42
Number of current councillors: 3

Manifesto:

- Fix roads and pavements to benefit motorists, cyclists and pedestrians
- Restore weekly black bin collections
- Reintroduce free 15-minute parking slots across the borough
- Reassess large salaries paid to top executives in the council
- Undo ‘decades of Labour failing’

‘We will take action on long-term empty homes’

The Liberal Democrats are predicting a “six-way fight” in some seats, a situation that could result in some “surprises”, says Grove Green candidate Arran Angus

by Sebastian Mann,
Local Democracy Reporter

While there are currently no Liberal Democrat councillors in the borough, the party has seen relatively strong levels of polling in Leyton, Grove Green and Highams Hill.

The party has characterised Labour and the Conservatives as “totally out of touch” and criticised Reform leader Nigel Farage as being similar to US president Donald Trump.

Locally, they will focus on pushing through the Whipps Cross Hospital rebuild, which has now been delayed until 2032 at the earliest and has been “kicked down the road”.

Crime will also be a focus, with the party saying Labour has “broken its promises” by closing police counters in the borough.

Arran Angus is standing as a candidate for the Liberal Democrats in Grove Green.

Like many candidates, Angus said the Lib Dems also want to see the roads improved. Waltham Forest was rated one of the ten worst localities in the country for potholes in a recent Department for Transport (DfT) survey, and he said it felt like “a lot of the roads in the borough have been allowed to deteriorate”.

“We hear that coming up a lot,” he added.

The council disagreed with the DfT’s



The Liberal Democrat team for Grove Green ward, Arran Angus, Fiona Hamilton, and Naomi McCarty Credit Waltham Forest Liberal Democrats

assessment and co-deputy leader Clyde Loakes said it was “very difficult to understand how they have reached these conclusions” when the council had made consistent investments into transport and roads across the borough.

If the Lib Dems win the town hall, they would bring empty homes back into use by executing empty dwelling management orders.

“It’s a power that councils hold and Waltham Forest has never used it to take action on long-term empty homes,” the Grove Green candidate added.

The Lib Dems won their biggest number of seats in the 2024 general election, returning 72 MPs.

They exist nationally as one of the longest running third-party options and alternatives for left-leaning voters.

Campaigners have been vocal across the borough since the 2022 local elections, opposing Labour decisions despite having no elected representatives at Waltham Forest Town Hall.

Angus said he would be “wary of writing off either of the two big parties” but said the upcoming May election felt like a “multi-party” contest and could see every party returning seats.

“It could be a six-way fight and we could see councillors getting elected on 15% of the vote, which means we could get all kinds of oddities turning up,” he said.

Having a more fleshed-out opposition and more threats to contend with “makes all councillors work harder,” the long-time campaigner added.

“They’ll be looking over their shoulder a bit. They can’t take getting elected for granted and there’s no guarantee they’ll get elected next time.”

Factsheet

Number of candidates standing: 45
Number of current councillors: 0

Manifesto:

- Fast-track funding to finally rebuild Whipps Cross Hospital
- Restore an in-person, 24-hour police front desk for residents
- Take action on long-term empty homes and crack down on poor-quality landlords
- Guarantee missed bin collections are fixed within 24 hours and provide extra bins where needed
- Fix hazardous pavements and adopt a “Fix It Once” approach to potholes
- Protect local trees, add more public bins, and expand CCTV at fly-tipping hotspots

ARTS & CULTURE

Delivering joy – one postbox at a time

A new documentary reveals the Walthamstow crocheter behind the borough's most joyful street art



Celia at work fitting a postbox topper
Credit: Karen Stanley

by Marco Marcelline

Walk through Walthamstow long enough and you'll eventually spot one: a colourful crocheted scene perched on top of a good old postbox.

The creator of these miniature scenes is Celia Berry, a long-time Walthamstow resident who has quietly sprinkled some joy on local postboxes.

Her work has become so recognisable locally that filmmaker Xaymaca Awoyungbo centered his latest documentary, *The Great British Yarn*, around her eccentric and heartwarming postbox toppers.

Celia says never intended to become a local celebrity. "I just enjoy crocheting," she explains, laughing. But what began as a single topper made during the pandemic has grown into more than 50 pieces sitting on postboxes across Walthamstow – from mythical beasts and carnival dancers to frogs and children's book characters.

Her first challenge came from friend Caramel Quin, who happens to be a local councillor. "She dared me to cover every postbox in the ward," Berry recalls. "I thought, why not?"

What followed were circus scenes, woodland creatures, seasonal

displays, a Black History Month tribute, and Wallace and Gromit.

As residents began sharing photos of the toppers online, Celia attempted to keep her identity largely under wraps. She says she liked watching people encounter her work without realising she was standing nearby. "It's lovely seeing someone smile at something you've made - you don't need them to know it's you."

Her toppers are intricate, with some taking several weeks to complete. Some have been stolen – one particularly ambitious octopus

topper vanished twice. "The neighbours actually tracked it down the first time," she says, amused. "It came back with an apology but then it disappeared again. You just have to laugh."

Xaymaca first spotted one of Celia's creations on his own street, and the idea for a documentary on postbox toppers and "yarn-bombers" was born.

The *Great British Yarn*, set for release on Monday 25th May, also highlights groups like Walthamstow Welcome whose weekly and free craft sessions (knitting, sewing, crocheting) at Walthamstow Library helps asylum seekers and isolated residents bond through creativity.

Ultimately, Xaymaca hopes the film will encourage viewers to value the small everyday acts that strengthen and sustain a community. He said: "Even though you're just one person, you could do a really small thing, and that could actually make people's lives a bit better."

Celia's motivation is simple: "If I can do something small that makes someone smile or brightens their day, that's enough."

'The Great British Yarn' will be available to watch on YouTube channel Stow Stories from Monday 25th May

Keep up to date with Celia's creations on Instagram: @craftyceals | See Xaymaca's work here: xaymacaawoyungbo.com



A crocheted Very Hungry Caterpillar
Credit: Celia Berry



'Invisible Me' cast Credit: Harry Elletson

Theatre review: 'Invisible Me'

Sarah Jones reviews *Invisible Me*, a 'glorious' and 'multi-faceted' portrayal of loneliness, reflection and human growth set here in Waltham Forest

It felt, at first, a little unnecessary to travel to Borough for comedic theatre last month.

With the deliciously eclectic offerings of Soho Theatre Walthamstow, Red Imp Comedy Club at both the Rose & Crown Theatre Bar and Walthamstow Trades Hall, there's very little reason these days to leave E17 at all.

But *Invisible Me*, written by Bren Gosling and currently playing at Southwark Playhouse (until Saturday 2nd May), is more than worth the tube fare. It's a glorious, multi-faceted and deeply observed portrait of loneliness, reflection and human growth shot through with both genuine pathos and moments of real humour.

Best of all, it's set here, in Waltham Forest.

Three beautifully drawn, socially isolated neighbours meet by chance as we witness their shared existential reckoning with turning 60, each expressed through monologues steeped in wistful regret.

We meet Lynn (Tessa Peake-Jones), a friendless divorcee paralysed by lifelong social anxiety, tentatively contemplating a bold new side hustle beyond her cleaning job at the local Travelodge. Jack (James Holmes), who

has lived quietly with HIV alongside his loving partner for 35 years, now finds himself bereft and increasingly agoraphobic following his husband's sudden death.

Alec (Kevin N. Golding) offers a stark contrast: once effortlessly charming, he now grapples with the slow erosion of his looks and the hollow legacy of a life built on superficiality. Estranged from his children, he is forced to confront the consequences of his casual homophobia and emotional detachment.

This is deep, often dark material, touching on adult themes of domestic violence and sexual identity, yet it is handled with sensitivity and care.

There are affectionate nods to Hoe Street, L'Hirondelle, and, most memorably, the unapologetically authentic Trades Hall itself, where our superb cast finally let loose at a joyous over-50s disco. It's a moment of release, of connection, of pure, hard-earned abandon.

The result is mesmerising and life-affirming – a denouement that feels both deeply earned and quietly triumphant. A piece that deserves to be brought home, and yet another jewel in Walthamstow's culturally rich crown.

'Invisible Me' is playing at Southwark Playhouse Borough until Saturday, 2nd May. Get tickets here: southwarkplayhouse.co.uk

Advertisement

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FOR ALL AGES



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LISTINGS

FESTIVAL

Shake the High Road

Saturday 2nd May, from 12.30pm until late

At venues around High Road Leytonstone

Leytonstone's eclectic all-day festival returns for its fifth birthday, bringing over 20 artists, DJs, talks and interviews across multiple venues within a one-minute walk of each other. Expect alternative live music, electronic sets, spoken word and special guests. First show at 1pm; one ticket grants access to all venues.

Tickets (from £19)

Visit shakethehighroad.com

MARKET

Walthamstow Farmers' Market

Sunday 3rd May, 10am–2pm

Walthamstow Town Square E17 7JN

Walthamstow Farmers' Market fills the top of the high street on Sunday with the freshest farm produce from friendly stalls. Customers love Brambletye's biodynamic eggs, juice and veg, Hook and Son's unpasteurised milk and cream, fresh game in season, Picks Organics meat and poultry (and breakfast rolls), fresh veg from Ted's Veg and Wild Country Organics, local honey, artisan bread, vegan cakes, a range of artisan cheeses and much more.

Free entry

WALKING TOUR

From Pimp Hall to Ale House Field

Monday 4th May, 2pm

Meet at Chingford Station E4 6AL

A guided walk exploring Chingford's historic green spaces, local heritage and hidden corners. Ideal for history fans and weekend wanderers. This walk is approximately two miles long and will include some walking on forest paths which may be muddy so please wear appropriate shoes.

For tickets (£12.50) search on Eventbrite: 'Pimp Hall to Ale House Field Walking Tour'

OPEN DAY

Waltham Forest College Open Event

Wednesday 6th May, 4pm

Waltham Forest College, Forest Road E17 4JB

A chance for prospective students to explore courses, meet tutors and tour facilities ahead of September enrolment. Waltham Forest College is rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, delivering excellent educational outcomes. The College works in close partnership with national employers, offering T Levels, Vocational (BTECs) and apprenticeship courses for school leavers (16–18). Adult courses are also available.

Free but registration required – find out more and sign up here: waltham.ac.uk/open-events

POETRY

Poetry reading

Wednesday 13th May, 7.30pm

Walthamstow Trades Hall, 61–63 Tower Hamlets Road E17 4RQ

Come celebrate the launch of David Floyd's new poetry collection 'A Night at the Snooker' and bring a poem too if you'd like to take part in the open mic.

In his own words, David "writes some poems and sometimes reads them out at events". His poetry combines a dry, sardonic wit and a highly original imagination.

A trustee and co-editor of Magma Poetry, David has been working in community media for over two decades and is managing director of Social Spider CIC, the publisher of seven local news publications (including Waltham Forest Echo).

Free, sign up to attend on Eventbrite by searching 'David Floyd book launch'

COMMUNITY

Waltham Forest Carnival Archive – Collection Day

Saturday 16th May, 11am–2pm

Walthamstow Library, High Street E17 7JN

Residents are invited to share memories, photos and memorabilia from over 100 years of Carnival history. Contributions will help build a living archive and future exhibition at Vestry House Museum.

Free entry

CYCLING

BWOW x Waltham Forest – Lee Valley VeloPark Ride

Saturday 16th May, 9.30am

Lee Valley VeloPark Road Circuit, Temple Mills

A guided women-led cycling session on the VeloPark circuit, suitable for improving riders looking for confidence and community. These sessions are designed especially for beginners or those getting back into cycling. Expect easy-paced rides through green spaces, quiet roads, and cycle paths – all starting from accessible locations in the borough.

Tickets on Eventbrite. Search: BWOW VeloPark Ride 1

ROCK

Grapes of Wrath

Friday 29th May, 7pm

Walthamstow Trades Hall, 61–63 Tower Hamlets Road E17 4RQ

Grapes of Wrath Presents returns to Walthamstow Trades Hall for the last time before summer break with a night full of post-metal riffs, blackened screamo, speed hardcore punk and power violence! Three incredible bands from Norwich, London and Leicester. Grim Harvest, IAN & Thumbsucker. Last show sold out in advance! Get your tickets before they're gone!

Get tickets (from £10)

Visit wegottickets.com/f/16919

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 18th May**.

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LOCAL NOTICES

Published: 24th April 2026

LICENCES FOR SPECIAL TREATMENT PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE IS GIVEN that **Eva Estrada Kockova** has applied to the London Borough of Waltham Forest for a Special Treatment Licence for:

- Laser tattoo removal, micropigmentation and microblading
- Licence for the premises: **Brow Boutique LDN, 278 High Road Leytonstone E11 3HS**

Anyone wishing to oppose the application must give notice in writing to the Licensing Officer, Licensing Services, Public Control, Waltham Forest Town Hall, Fellowship Square, Forest Road, Walthamstow, London, E17 4JF WITHIN 28 DAYS OF PUBLICATION specifying the grounds of opposition.

Persons objecting to the grant of a licence must be prepared to attend in person before a Committee of the Council.

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Book your licence advert or notice with your local community newspaper!

Email for a quote to licences@socialspider.com or call **Klaudia Kiss 07732 000 430** or **Mark Brown 07728 520 116**
Next publication date: 29th May | Booking deadline: 27th May

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*a selection of our regular stockists, but it is not an exhaustive list



AROUND THE BOROUGH

ST JAMES ST

St James Street area improvement works begin



Artist's impression of Courtenay Place once complete Credit Feix & Merlin Architects

Works have begun to transform the immediate area around St James Street Station and Courtenay Place.

The project is part of a wider £17million Levelling Up Fund programme of investment given to Waltham Forest Council to regenerate parts of Walthamstow.

The council aims to turn Courtenay Place, which connects

St James Street Station and the bus stand with Walthamstow High Street, into a "green link" between St James Street and Walthamstow High Street, with a new pocket park, as well as other improvements to public spaces.

The improvement scheme also includes new lighting, signage, art projects, and landscape design, as well as the refurbishing of arches with a long-term view of

businesses moving in and opening up shops. Ongoing structural assessment and feasibility studies on opening up the arches will continue through 2026.

The plan additionally involves the removal of physical barriers and "unfriendly" security fencing, overgrown shrubs, and soil (some of which could be reused in new planting).

These upgrades are due for completion later this year and the St James Street Station bus stand is closed until Saturday, 13th June while works continue.

Access to local businesses will remain open, and clear signage is in place to guide pedestrians along alternative routes throughout the closure.



St James Street Station bus stand Credit Waltham Forest Council

LEYTONSTONE

Poundland to shut High Road store



Poundland's High Road Leytonstone store Credit Google Streetview

Poundland is set to shut its Leytonstone store on Sunday, 17th May after it failed to secure new lease terms for the site.

The 5,800 sq ft store in High Road Leytonstone began a clearance sale with discounts of up to 40% in March.

The discount chain has been

battling slumping sales for some time, and last year it was bought by retail-focused investment firm Gordon Brothers for a nominal £1.

But Poundland has said the closure of its Leytonstone store is not linked to its recent restructuring, which saw it ending 2025 with 651 shops, compared to

over 800 before reorganisation.

A spokesperson told the *Echo* the closure was "a consequence of standard business-as-usual lease events expected at a retailer with a large store network, not because of last year's restructure".

They added: "Sadly, we've been unable to secure new lease terms in Leytonstone which is why we have begun a clearance sale ahead of the store's closure with discounts of up to 40%.

"We look forward to continuing to welcome shoppers to our stores at Leyton Mills on Marshall Road and Palace Parade in Walthamstow."

The *Echo* understands that staff will be offered roles at other Poundland stores.

According to real estate company Savills, the landlord is accepting rental offers on the site in excess of £180,000 per annum.

UPPER WALTHAMSTOW

Terraced house destroyed in toaster fire

A terraced house in Hale End Road, Walthamstow was destroyed in a huge blaze caused by a faulty toaster on Easter Sunday last month (5th April).

Ten fire engines and around 70 firefighters tackled the fire, which London Fire Brigade (LFB) have said was accidental.

One man left the home before the LFB arrived at around 10.30am. There were no reports of any injuries and the fire was brought under control by crews from stations including Walthamstow, Woodford, and Leyton at 1.41pm.

One of the LFB's 32-metre turntable ladders was used at the scene as a water tower to help tackle the fire from above.

Local residents were advised to keep their windows and doors shut due to smoke travel in the area.

A London Fire Brigade spokesperson said: "Avoid keeping items such as toasters under cupboards or in contact with combustible items such as tea towels or kitchen roll to prevent heat build-up.

"It's also important to make



Firefighters tackled the blaze with a 32-metre turntable ladder Credit London Fire Brigade

sure you keep toasters clean to help prevent fires.

"Firefighters also recommend that you have a look at our online Home Fire Safety Checker to make sure there are no hidden hazards in your home."

CHINGFORD

Post office robbers 'make off with £40k'

Two robbers stole £40,000 in cash from a Chingford post office before making off on e-bikes.

Bystanders saw individuals in masks entering the Station Road building at around 5.20pm on Thursday, 26th March.

Metropolitan Police officers arrived at the scene within two minutes, but the suspects had already left the scene on their e-bikes.

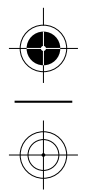
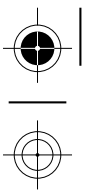
A Met spokesperson told the *Echo* that no injuries were reported in the incident.

Chingford and Woodford Green MP Sir Iain Duncan Smith visited the post office where he spoke with affected staff.

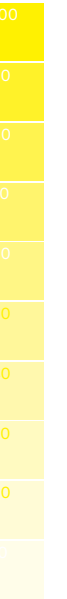
In a statement posted on Facebook, he said: "I know many local residents will be concerned to hear that the post office the following day on Station Road was broken into.

"Police responded quickly and an investigation is now underway."

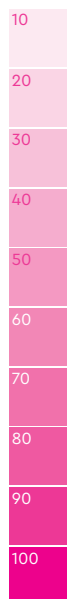
As of Thursday, 23rd April, no arrests have been made and enquiries remain ongoing.



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Next edition print deadlines

Waltham Forest Echo issue #135 June

Print date: 28th May

Publication date: 29th May

Scan here to email our team for a quote



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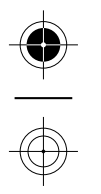
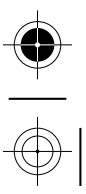
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But because we have no shareholders or wealthy backers we rely on local people and organisations to support our journalism.

The number of supporters making monthly contributions is growing steadily — helping us to break even and look at how we can grow as a publication.

With continued support from Echo readers we aim to:
 Produce more local journalism | Expand the size of the paper | Distribute to more locations

This month, 327 supporters contributed 32% of our monthly costs. While the paper remains free to read in print and online, every penny of income is reinvested in our local journalism. Can you support us with £5 per month to help us do more?

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