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Village's 'safety fears' amid rise in antisocial behaviour and graffiti

Belsize Village residents are worried about their safety after a spate of anti-social behaviour in the area, including a rise in graffiti.

Resident Marko Milovanovic noticed the tags across the area while walking from England's Lane to the village on Sunday. He said: "They are obviously not a Banksy-type graffiti and they do make me feel less safe because someone is clearly able to vandalise other's property over and over again without any consequences."

The graffiti began to appear a month ago. They were initially covered up and resprayed by Camden Council.

Neighbours are unhappy and think more needs to be done to prevent the vandalism from happening in the first place.

Conservative councillor Maria Higson said: "Over the past few months, we have also been pressing the council for better security measures in Belsize Village, to act as a permanent deterrent for graffiti as well as other forms of anti-social behaviour."

It's been suggested that improved or extended CCTV coverage may deter vandals, and help catch those who are spraying the area. Pictures seen by the Ham&High show the same tag in several places, which makes residents think it is one person responsible.

Camden's current tactics to deal with the issue hasn't pleased some. Linda Grove, of Belsize Lane, said: "We've informed the council and as soon as they cover it up, the graffiti returns."

But Camden's environment chief Cllr Adam Harrison defended the borough's approach. He said: "CCTV can be used to identify graffiti writing taking place. However, it is not very effective in identifying the perpetrators for a court prosecution.

"Camden Council aim to remove reported graffiti within five working days or 24 hours if it is racist or offensive as they believe quick removal of graffiti generally deters graffiti writers and taggers from an area."

Camden has advised building owners who suffer from graffiti to use anti-graffiti coatings.

<https://www.hamhigh.co.uk/news/rise-in-graffiti-and-antisocial-behaviour-in-belsize-village-3619724>

Exmouth Market businesses help out homeless people with 'Take One Leave One' coat rail and pledge cards

The business community surrounding Exmouth Market has come together to give rough sleepers warm clothes, hot meals, haircuts, Oyster cards and more.

A "Take One Leave One" rail has been left outside of Holy Redeemer church, in the Clerkenwell market street so that people can leave warm clothes for those who need them.

The organiser Stefan Simanowitz, first got the idea a year ago.

He told the Gazette: "I saw on Twitter that someone had put a picture of one of these rails up with a message saying if you're cold, take one. If you can help, leave one. And I thought what a simple, beautiful idea."

The idea itself has grown with the addition of "pledge cards" – a system where customers of local shops can buy an extra coffee, pizza or even a haircut that can be donated to the homeless.

Pledge cards are left by the clothes rail and homeless people can simply take one and then trade it in at the relevant shop.

Mr Simanowitz explains that involving the locals was easy.

He added: "What this has shown is that people really do want to help. It's a way that not only the community can get involved and break down the barriers that exist between homeless people in the area but individuals can as well," he said.

The most popular pledges come from Brill Cafe. Owner Jeremy Brill, 58, said: "We very much feel we're part of the community and we've always helped out people when we can.

"We give people teas and coffees if they're obviously needing them so this seemed like a really good way of extending that."

Pizza Pilgrims have had at least five pledges redeemed and Hairdressers Barber Streisand is pleased to have had at least one customer buy an extra cut and hope more will follow.

The scheme was originally only meant to last a week but is coming into its third week and plans to extend it permanently are underway.

The next step for the scheme is an ambitious plan to turn the pledge card scheme digital so people can donate to rough sleepers via shops online.

<https://www.islingtongazette.co.uk/news/exmouth-market-businesses-help-out-homeless-people-with-take-one-3811688>



Benefits freeze and Brexit uncertainty continues to leave families on brink

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation warns that failure to scrap the cap's final years will leave parents juggling bills just to survive

Families in poverty will have to endure another year of frozen benefits from today despite the rise in the cost of living.

More families are expected to fall into poverty as a result of the government's continued [freeze on benefits and tax credits](#) until 2020, despite declaring austerity over.

Campbell Robb, chief executive of the independent [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#), said: "Keeping benefits and tax credits frozen is unjustifiable. 4.1 million children are now locked in poverty – nearly three quarters of whom are in a working household."

The freeze was introduced in April 2016 by then-Chancellor George Osborne, but between then and November 2018 JRF reckon that the cost of living for people on low incomes increased by £900.

Continuing the freeze for a fourth year will leave the poorest of families an average of £560 worse off, which is the equivalent of three months of food shopping for a low-income household. That is down to stagnation as benefits have not kept pace with the rising costs that families have to meet to keep themselves afloat.

Robb said: "It's not right that more parents will face impossible situations – trying to decide which essential bills to pay and what they can cut back on to make it through each week."

The decision to continue the freeze for another year will mean 10.7 million people in poverty missing out on £220 a year to help cover the [rising cost of living](#). Another 200,000 people will also be locked into poverty

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation are one of 10 charities that wrote to the Chancellor Philip Hammond in February asking him to end the freeze.

According to the foundation, ending the freeze today would support 14 million people on low incomes and help a further 200,000 break [free from poverty](#).

And it would be an especially crucial move with the uncertainty around Brexit still raging on with little indication of how it could affect families economically.

Robb said: “The risks of economic uncertainty should not be allowed to disproportionately affect those with no leeway in their finances. Ending the freeze is the right thing to do and would have helped working families stay afloat.”

As the government approaches its spending review, Robb wants it to look at how best to protect people from harm who are otherwise left with no anchor in what are uncertain times.

<https://www.bigissue.com/latest/benefits-freeze-and-brex-it-uncertainty-continues-to-leave-families-on-brink/>

Councils doubt government will hit target of ending rough sleeping by 2027

A think tank survey finds that 61 per cent of local authorities reckon the lofty ambition is unlikely to be met

The government’s target to eradicate rough sleeping by 2027 will not be met according to over 40 per cent of councils, a new survey finds.

Research by the [New Local Government Network](#) [NLGN] think tank showed that councils are far off meeting their 2027 target – particularly in towns and cities.

Amongst predominantly urban councils, 61 per cent think they are unlikely to [eradicate rough sleeping by 2027](#), with 38 per cent saying they are unable to halve it by 2022 citing the negative impact of Universal Credit and the lack of funding as reasons.

Adam Lent, director of the New Local Government Network, said: “The government needs to work closely and urgently with councils to understand what extra resources are needed to meet the targets and how planned welfare reforms can be revised to prevent them contributing to rough sleeping.”

The survey found that 65 percent of councils felt that [Universal Credit](#) had led to an increase in homelessness with less than three per cent reporting a decrease.

These worrying figures have been released one year after the [Homelessness Reduction Act \(HRA\)](#) came into force.

The HRA placed a new duty on local authorities to prevent homelessness of all families and single people, regardless of priority need, who are eligible for assistance and threatened with homelessness.

To fulfil these duties councils were provided with £72 million from central government, however these latest figures suggest that most councils feel they do not have enough funding.

The survey also asked local authorities to comment on the impact of the HRA, one council responded: "There are long term and systemic issues that have combined to cause the current increase in homelessness. These will be exacerbated if the broader public sector services are not funded properly."

Other problems the council's encountered were a lack of suitable temporary accommodation, the inability to build more affordable housing or buy it and recruiting suitably qualified staff.

However, [official rough sleeping statistics did report the first fall since 2010](#) last year but this progress was offset by a significant rise in cities like London and Manchester.

<https://www.bigissue.com/latest/councils-doubt-government-will-hit-target-of-ending-rough-sleeping-by-2027/>

Tower Hamlets the Breastfeeding Capital of England

With breastfeeding rates that high do the mothers of Tower Hamlet's know a secret the rest of womankind just didn't get let into?

“No way do we try and push breastfeeding on mums that don't want it.” Joy Hasting Baby Feeding Service Manager at Barts Health NHS Trust, explains from behind her desk in the rather small, rather busy, breastfeeding office at the Royal London Hospital. “Practically 90 per cent of our mums start off wanting to breastfeed so we concentrate on those mums, helping them to breastfeed.” she continues.

90 per cent sounds like a large number of pregnant mothers wanting to breastfeed especially when you consider that according to new figures from Public Health England (PHE) only just over 40% are still breastfeeding after 6 - 8 weeks. However, in Tower Hamlets, East London the area that the Baby Feeding Service from the Royal London Hospital serves, 8 in 10 mums are pushing past that 6 - 8 week mark and beyond.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that mothers should breastfeed babies exclusively for six months and then once baby starts eating solids supplementary breastfeeding is suggested. These new statistics from PHE show numbers of mothers doing this are dropping suggesting that this messaging from the NHS Start4Life campaign, the WHO, midwives, and health visitors is not making any difference.

Never the less this advice is being given to all mothers nationwide, so what is it that makes Tower Hamlets essentially the breastfeeding capital of England? Many new mums elsewhere will tell you they tried breastfeeding and it just didn't work out for them. With breastfeeding rates that high do the mothers of Tower Hamlet's know a secret the rest of womankind just didn't get let into?

Far from being a secret most new mothers seem to be aware of the benefits of breastfeeding so perhaps the message is getting through, despite not always being heeded. “It was my preference as I believed it would strengthen my bond with baby and also provide better nutrition and boost their immune system,” says Tashya a slightly nervous new mother living in Tower Hamlets.

Tashya is quick to add “Not that I ruled out formula completely. A fed baby is best, as a friend told me.” A sentiment shared by many people, after all when you've tried your best to breastfeed and it just isn't working it may be time to hit the bottle as it were.

Laura Palfreeman a first time mum from the borough of Brent did exactly that and bottle-fed her baby. She did not receive breastfeeding support at all “The health visitor kept saying you're doing fine, but I knew I wasn't” she confessed, explaining that if she had the support she could

have breastfed for longer, but eventually gave up at 6 weeks. “The plan was always to breastfeed,” she added sadly.

Back in tower hamlets, they have various different organisations, pockets of support. The main support is given by the tower hamlets baby feeding service, who have eight full-time baby feeding specialists. They are also peer supporters, mothers who have all breastfed. The support starts during pregnancy with classes, continues in the hospital after the baby is born and is then carried into the community and the home. Home visits take up the majority of the baby feeding services time. Their facebook page is optimistically titled ‘Tower Hamlet’s babies are born to breastfeed’.

Questionably all babies are ‘born to breastfeed’ even if in other boroughs mothers are not living up to that mantra. The reality is it’s a hard one to live up to. Tashya’s little one is four months old and still being breastfed which she accredits in a large part to the baby feeding services in Tower Hamlets. “I saw members of the feeding service in hospital and they visited me at home. I had also been to a workshop prior to giving birth. As I had some complications with baby weight gain in the first week, they were incredibly helpful in enabling me to continue breastfeeding my baby.”

Tower Hamlet’s mothers seem to have won the postcode lottery in the way of baby feeding services. As unfair as that is on mothers elsewhere the reason for their vast services gives hope to other boroughs. Hastings clarifies the situation “So I think there is help in the community in other areas but perhaps not as well funded as us and that’s because Tower Hamlet’s public health see breastfeeding as a high priority.” The suggestion is that other boroughs public health could follow in their footsteps and boost their breastfeeding rates.

In Dr. Claire Ingham’s opinion, the problem of a lack of breastfeeding is cultural “Breastfeeding is a learned skill that we are poorly taught.” she explains “Poor preparation is also cultural. We don’t live in a breastfeeding culture” It is true that western women are not always prepared to breastfeed because they have the luxury of other options.

Hastings seems to agree with the cultural aspects of the situation “In this area, we have nearly 55 - 60 per cent of mothers who are of Bangladeshi origin so the vast majority expect that they will breastfeed.” she says. In fact, Tower Hamlets have the largest Bangladeshi population in England accounting for over 32 per cent of the borough’s population way above the average of 3 per cent.

It’s not just ethnic origin that could be having an effect on breastfeeding figures. As well as being a diverse borough Tower Hamlets is also a poor borough with higher than average unemployment rates. Meaning more mums are staying at home. Tashya admits “Breastfeeding is also a lot easier and cheaper, once you get the hang of it.” With the incentive of saving up to £60 a month on unbrought formula milk, why wouldn’t the borough’s mothers want to breastfeed?

Tower Hamlets is not the only borough to offer breastfeeding services but it may well be that other areas offering similar services are wasting their time. Who is the first person you go to for advice on child-rearing, your midwife, the health visitor, your doctor or more than likely your own mother. If your mother didn't breastfeed then are you less likely to? Carmel Lloyd Head of education at the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) believes so. "Low breastfeeding rates in parts of the UK unfortunately indicate a much bigger social and cultural problem that needs to be tackled. There are some areas where many generations of women haven't been given the example of breastfeeding," she said.

Knowsley, Merseyside was highlighted in the PHE statistics as being the least likely to breastfeed their babies. As a white working-class area, this was no surprise to Hastings who said: "In the north of England there's quite a high white working class population and they're less likely to breastfeed, they come from families where they were bottle fed and its gone on for a couple of generations. So there are areas in the country where if you mention breastfeeding the pregnant mum or the new mum will go 'oh no I don't want to do that go away! I don't want to talk about that'."

The same repulsion or horror is not a sentiment found amongst the mothers of Tower Hamlets and Hastings notes that most of their mothers are willing to give it a go "You do get the occasional mother that doesn't want to but their not sort of repulsed by it they are quite happy to give it a try." Perhaps the borough being Unicef Baby Friendly accredited helps. Which means everyone mothers come into contact with are trained in helping to breastfeed - right down to the GP surgeries receptionist.

Subsequently what is being seen in Tower Hamlets is the rebirth of a culture of breastfeeding which goes beyond simply being offered services to help to breastfeed and into seeing breastfeeding as the normal thing to do, and not just the natural one.