

ELEPHANT AND CASTLE

'Heating collapsed before turn off'

By John Prendergast

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EL/EPHANT AND CASTLE: Southwark Council had plans to turn off heating and hot water on the Heygate Estate three weeks before it informed residents, it has been claimed.

Shocked tenants and leaseholders only learnt on the day services stopped, May 23, that utilities were being turned off when hand delivered letters were posted through doors.

But a council spokeswoman stated that the council turned off the district heating every year, and it was, already speaking to residents about installing water heaters when the estate's heating system collapsed.

The 'News' has been passed a document dated March 31 that shows the area office was conducting a survey on the estate in relation to installing electric heaters in homes. A resident on the estate, who asked to remain anonymous, said: "I called up and asked why they needed to do the survey and I was told homes were being surveyed for heating and hot water, because they were going to cut the district heating, as it was becoming an expensive option."

A council spokeswoman added: "Every year we turn off the heating in the summer, so we were speaking to residents about making preparations to do this. But in the meantime the main boiler broke down irreparably on 23 April, so we have now brought forward our plans to offer alternative heating and hot water."

Waiting for new home 'mental torture' says estate pensioner

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A PENSIONER is claiming she is being put through 'mental torture' as she attempts to get off the deserted Heygate Estate, which is being decanted by the council before it is demolished.

Doreen Gee, 71, has put in 32 bids to get away from her isolated tower block, has recently had her hot water and heating turned off by the council and this week was offered a property before it was withdrawn hours later.

Ms Gee finally thought she found an ideal two-bedroom home in Braganza Street in Kennington when the council wrote to her last Thursday and formally offered her the house.

But within hours they had reclassified it as a three bedroom house, and promptly pulled the offer from her, leaving the arthritic pensioner in floods of tears, she said.

When the 'News' visited her she told us: "This is mental torture. People must think we are refusing to move, but I am not. I am desperate to get off."

The council has stated Heygate residents are in Band One (the highest) in the home allocation system. Homesearch, but another bid for a home in Date Street left her in eighth position.



Doreen Gee on the Heygate Estate

Ms Gee, who is secretary of the estate's tenants' and residents' association and has won two civic awards for her service to the community, claims council officers have told her people downsizing their home were awarded that property. She added: "They are causing me so much stress and my blood pressure goes up and down like a yo-yo. I think they should just

reverse the decision - that house is two rooms and a box room at best. Who reclassified it after the letter went to me? It is beginning to feel they are victimising me."

A council spokeswoman said: "We sympathise with Doreen's situation, and we are in touch with her every week to talk through the available properties that she can bid for, but we

have to prioritise people based on their need for housing.

"Doreen should not have been offered a three bedroom home and we apologise for the error. Sadly, we have a massive shortage of family homes and over 5,000 households living in overcrowded conditions.

"We will continue to work with Doreen to find her a suitable home."