

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **LEASEHOLDERS' FORUM** held on **TUESDAY, 28TH MAY, 2024** at 7.00 pm in Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

Carolyn Morgan (Chair)
Joy Palmer (Vice-Chair) (joined remotely)
Azra Bloomfield
Billy Byatt (joined remotely)
David Hart (joined remotely)
Isabella Luger (joined remotely)
Rosalie Miles
Dr Clive Sneddon (joined remotely)
Louise Upton (joined remotely)
Karl Vaughan
Wolfram Westendorf (joined remotely)
Peter Wright

OTHER LEASEHOLDERS PRESENT (On-line)

Altaf Shaikh
Danielle Litterick
Jennifer Fauquet
Jennifer Smallwood
Lalita Uttamsingh
Lesley Mortell
Otilie Stevenson
Patricia Wager
Preethi Reddy
Robert Lopez
Yvonne Green (in-person)

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Sagal Abdi-Wali (Cabinet Member for Better Homes)
Councillor Steve Adams
Councillor Nancy Jirira
Susanne Afra (Head of Capital Works (joined remotely)
Emma Cardoso (Strategic Finance Lead) (joined remotely)
Geraldine Littlechild (Leaseholder Service Manager (joined remotely)
Sola Odusina, (Principal Committee Officer)

These minutes are in draft form only and therefore not approved or amended until the next meeting of the Leaseholders' Forum. Please note that these minutes include opinions expressed by the attendees at the meeting and should not be regarded as giving advice.

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND INTRODUCTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Brigitte Ascher, Patrick Hagopian and Richard Walker.

Other Forum members not present included Aldires Bugia and Philip Dunne.

Leaseholders were informed that Martyn Swain had resigned from the Forum prior to the meeting.

2. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Carolyn Morgan and Peter Wright were nominated by Forum members for the role of chair.

Carolyn Morgan's nomination was seconded while Peter Wright's was not.

Following a vote Carolyn Morgan was elected as chair with 10 votes.

RESOLVED –

THAT Carolyn Morgan be elected as Chair of the Leaseholders' Forum for the 2024/25 municipal year.

TO NOTE: All

3. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Joy Palmer was nominated and seconded by Forum members for the role of vice-chair.

This was followed by a vote and Joy Palmer as the only contestant was elected as Vice Chair with 9 votes.

RESOLVED –

THAT Joy Palmer be elected as Vice-chair of the Leaseholders' Forum for the 2024/25 municipal year.

TO NOTE: All

4. ELECTION OF COMMUNICATIONS MEMBER

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Louise Upton was nominated and seconded by Forum members for the role of Communications member.

This was followed by a vote and Louise Upton as the only contestant was elected as Communications member.

RESOLVED –

THAT Louise Upton be elected as the Forum's Communication member for the 2024/25 municipal year.

TO NOTE: All

5. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

There were none.

6. CONSTITUTION AND CODE OF CONDUCT

RESOLVED

That the Constitution and Code of Conduct be noted by the Forum.

7. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting of 19th March 2024 and the actions arising from those minutes.

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 19th March 2024 be approved as an accurate record.

8. MATTERS ARISING

Matters Arising from the minutes 19th March 2024

Major Works Working Group Update

The Head of Repairs had agreed at the last Leaseholders' Forum meeting to take away and discuss with the Head of Capital Works issues relating to lack of detail explaining the reason for increases in service charge bills.

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The Head of Capital Works commented that she had recently been informed of the request for more detail regarding cost increases in leaseholder bills. She would need to take this away to discuss with her team, colleagues in Leaseholder Services, and Major Repairs and undertake leaseholder consultation. They would need to collectively agree that if more detailed information were to be provided the format it would be in to make sure it was in a user-friendly format for Leaseholder Services to digest and share with Leaseholders. The Head of Capital Works agreed to take this away have some discussions with colleagues and follow this up.

Action By: Head of Capital Works

Leaseholders Services Update

The action from the last meeting was that the Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income would present the process plan providing information on medium-term actions as well as some indication of what the long-term road map would look like.

The Leaseholder Services Manager advised that this action related to the Leaseholder Service redesign project and the Cabinet Adviser on Improving Services for Camden Leaseholders report to Cabinet which were both closely linked. She commented that a formal response to the Cabinet Adviser's report would be presented to Cabinet in July, once this was approved along with any resulting action plan would be shared with the Leaseholders' Forum at the September meeting.

Action By: Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income

The Chair informed the Forum that she had met with the Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income last week, he had provided information and an update on the Leaseholder Services Design testing phase which had been shared with Forum members, adding that she was happy to circulate this to leaseholders along with further information provided by the Policy Design team.

The Chair advised the Forum that the Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income had informed her that he was happy to provide an informal update on the service redesign to the Forum during the summer rather than waiting till September. She noted that the update would still be provided to the September meeting but it would be good to have an informal update which could be done virtually prior to September.

Billy Byatt (Member of the Leaseholder Services Working Group) who had also met with the Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income and the officer from the Digital Transformation Team provided a note of caution to the Forum, advising that nothing substantive was likely to be achieved by September, the Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income was not going to indicate that all the issues had been fixed as the team was working through how things were done at the moment, capturing a lot of the old ways of working.

The Leaseholder Services Manager agreeing with the comments of Billy Byatt advised that a lot of work was going into the process mapping, it was worth putting

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the time into getting that right so that the system that came out in the end met service users' needs.

With regards to leaseholders providing feedback on the telephone survey to either Carolyn Morgan or Patrick Hagopian, it was noted that no feedback had been received from Leaseholders.

The Vice Chair of the Forum had written to the Leader of the Council endorsing the recommendation in Councillor Slater's report for the appointment of a Deputy Cabinet Member for Leaseholders. The Cabinet Member for Better Homes commented that the Leader was supportive of the recommendation but it would still need to go through the process before approval.

In response to a Councillor's query about whether calls to the contact centre would be tracked in the new system being developed as leaseholders had expressed their frustration in sometimes finding it difficult to get through on the phone to Camden officers, the Leaseholder Services Manager advised that if Contact Camden could answer the query this would be dealt with, without putting the caller through to Leaseholder Services. If on the other hand it was a more complex query it could be put through to Leaseholder Services but more information would be required which might result in the query being passed on to another department because it might for example relate to a repairs issue. If the person really did want to speak to somebody in Leaseholder Services, then the officer from Contact Camden should be advised of this.

It was noted that this mirrored the feedback the service had been getting from the redesign project and the Cabinet Adviser for Improving Services to Leaseholders had got from his meetings with leaseholders. Camden was looking at all this in terms of how it communicated with residents and how residents could communicate with the Council.

9. CABINET MEMBER FOR BETTER HOMES

Councillor Sagal Abdi-Wali (Cabinet Member for Better Homes) introduced herself providing the Forum with a brief outline of her career to date.

She thanked the Forum for inviting her to the meeting, congratulated the Leaseholders' Forum Chair for successfully being appointed to the role and paid tribute to the outgoing Cabinet Member for Better Homes (Councillor Meric Apak) for his dedication and work in the role over the past 6 years.

She informed the Forum that:

- She had worked in local government for the past 15 years since graduating from University. A significant portion of that had involved her working with the Housing Department in Camden as well as other departments across the Council.

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- As an employee and resident of Camden she saw and had learnt how things worked taking an interest in politics and was interested in how things could be improved and decided to stand for the role of Councillor.
- Since becoming a Councillor two years ago she had been Chair of the Council's Audit and Corporate Governance Committee and a member of the Housing Scrutiny Committee.
- As a member of the Housing Scrutiny Committee and ward Councillor she had been interested in hearing leaseholders and residents' views as well as Councillor Slater's report and the recommendations from that report.
- It had been interesting to note the common and universal areas of concern for residents and leaseholders.
- Once the report had been through the Cabinet process, she was keen to take up the findings from the report and follow through on improving the service for residents and leaseholders in terms of communication and management systems.
- An area which she was keen to look at was broadening Council access points for residents and leaseholders to contact and communicate with the Council at different hours of the day.

Responding to a Forum member's remark about numerous phone calls to the Council before an issue could be resolved, the Cabinet member commented that by using various other tools such as WhatsApp and email to communicate, the Council could be made aware of the issue before the Council operative had attended the premises which would reduce the number of times the resident would need to make contact reducing the number of phone calls.

The Chair suggested that it would be useful as part of the transformation process if the Service areas could provide a breakdown of incoming calls, emails and texts received, and how many of these calls were timed out and abandoned to have a clearer picture of where the issues were.

Action by: Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income

The Cabinet Member commented that what was coming out of the Housing transformation process, Councillor Slater's report as well as service reviews, was the need for service and cultural changes which was what was being worked on. With regards to individual issues raised she would be happy to discuss these with the individuals outside of the meeting.

In response to a query about the breakdown of leaseholders in Street Properties and Estates and which properties had owner occupiers and which properties were sublet as this would impact on how the residents would relate to the Council, the Leaseholder Services Manager agreed to provide a breakdown of leaseholders occupying Street Properties and Estates.

Action By: Leaseholder Services Manager

The Cabinet Member informed the Forum that she could be contacted by email.

The Cabinet Member for Better Homes was thanked for attending the meeting.

10. CAPITAL WORKS

Consideration was given to the Head of Planned Capital Works Update.

Susanna Afra Head of Capital Works informed the Forum that her team was based in Property Management under Gavin Haynes the Director and the overall head of department. Her team worked alongside the Repairs Team and other teams in Property Management.

The work delivered by her team included:

- Work on housing and schools.
- Housing maintenance, such as roofs and windows.
- Maintenance of communal areas, lighting in communal areas, lifts and boiler houses, door entry systems.
- Fire safety which has required a lot of investment because of all the fire risk assessment actions.
- A Retrofit Team responsible for retrofitting some Council properties targeting those properties with a poor energy rating.

There was a Forward Programme of Works which was based on the Stock Condition Survey that took place at the end of last year (2023).

A list of properties where external works were required had been provided from the Asset Data Team in Property Management. The list of internal work required such as bathrooms and kitchens that might need upgrading or replacing was being reviewed by her team. While the Stock Condition survey made some recommendations, the Council would need to commission some consultants to provide more detailed scoping at the early stages.

Residents impacted by the work would be contacted in the coming months detailing what was required to be done. The larger projects such as boiler houses, lift maintenance took a bit longer and the scoping was a lot more detailed. The Fire Safety Team were working on a large number of actions any residents impacted by those fire safety works would be contacted regarding the work as well as those residents impacted by the smaller scale retrofit work.

The Council had been successful in obtaining quite a large amount of money in grant funding from the Social Housing Demonstration Fund, Government Grant Fund which the Council also had to match fund. The Council was looking at the cost benefit ratio of how much it should invest and whether it was a good investment with the match funding. Although on paper the funding looked generous, there was a lot for the Council to do with limited funds. There was the need to prioritise each of the work areas.

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The Forward Programme was being developed and would be shared with leaseholders once signed off by the Director and the Council's Finance team. Any additional work required that funding was not available for would need to be incorporated into the Council's Asset Management Strategy.

Forum Members raised concerns about

- Patched repairs meant assets deteriorated long term.
- Use of external consultants for Stock Condition Survey was not good value for money.
- Inadequate Major Works consultation process (on a specific case)
- Fire safety programme was over-specified for Victorian street properties and money was being wasted. Many had hollow walls which were not addressed while signage was overkill for properties with just two or three flats.
- Chair pointed out that she had been charged for a fire risk assessment in service charge and had spent several months asking for a copy and none was provided.

The Councillor for Fortune Green raised a concern about leasehold houses that had not had fire safety work done.

Responding to questions from Forum members and the concerns raised the Head of Capital Works gave the following information:

- The Asset Management Strategy would identify what the Council needed to do to generate potential income so it could continue to invest in its stock.
- The Council had 33,000 properties it was required to maintain which was a huge challenge particularly since the Grenfell tragedy with the Council required to spend a lot more money on fire safety.
- The reason the Council had to invest so much in fire safety in recent years had been due to changes in legislation which had required the Council to invest in certain areas which it had probably not done before.
- The reality was that the Council had limited funds and needed to be strategic around what it did to make sure it continued to maintain its stock.
- The Council was good at taking up opportunities to bid for grant funding, in the last few years it had received about £11m worth of funding.
- It would be worthwhile if the new Head of Asset Management Strategy shared the strategy with Leaseholders.
- The Chair suggested that the Major Works Working Group meet with the Head of Asset Management Strategy to look at the Council's Asset Strategy. This should include detail on the financials of the budget.

Action By: Major Works Working Group and Head of Asset management Strategy.

- With regards to lack of consultation and engagement from Project Managers relating to works being carried out on leaseholder properties, it would be good if Forum members could email examples of when this had occurred so it could be followed up. Feedback on the consultation and engagement process had been received and taken on board from the Forum to make sure that Project Managers were providing all residents with advance notice of planned works.
- The Asset Data Team conducted a 100% survey of all external and communal areas and a 10% survey of internal areas identifying which bathrooms and kitchens needed to be replaced.
- The surveys identified what those works might cost based on a standard set of rates using the Council's framework.
- The Council did not have an in-house survey team or the finances to employ a full-time team, consultants carried out the stock condition survey which would be sense checked by Project Managers and experienced Programme Managers.
- The use of external consultants allowed the Council some flexibility. They were only used or employed when required which worked well for the Council. The Chair suggested in the interest of transparency that it would be interesting to know the cost of using consultants to carry out the stock condition survey compared to the cost of having an internal in-house team.
- The Signage Strategy used by the Council in properties was what had been advised by the Fire Safety Advisor and the London Fire Brigade as well as recommendations from independent firms used to carry out fire risk assessments.
- With regards to hollow walls the Council had to abide by the latest legislation and make sure the properties were as safe as they could be. A balance needed to be made about how much could be done in the properties. The feedback about hollow walls would be taken back to the team.
- The Council had a programme of works which was based on risk assessments and risk factors. Risk assessments in Houses compared to blocks of flats were considered to be lower risk. The Council had a long list of projects that it was working through.
- All fire risk assessments were available on-line.
- An officer was developing the engagement process and communication that would be going to all residents particularly those in high rise blocks. It would

be a good idea if this could be shared at a future Forum meeting possibly September.

Action By: Chair / Fire Safety Engagement Officer

- There was also a Building Safety Manager for each of the high-rise blocks who residents could contact to provide feedback.

The Head of Capital Works was thanked for her responses and attending the meeting.

11. LEASEHOLDER SERVICES

It was noted that a lot of the Leaseholder Services update had been covered under the matters arising item 8.

Results of the Leaseholders Telephone Survey

The Chair informed the Forum that the Council had commissioned Housemark to conduct a leaseholder survey which took place in February 2024. Officers indicated that they had only got the headline information with the detailed results not yet available.

- It was based on 565 respondents, the top line leaseholder satisfaction score was 30% which was down on the 2019 score of 35%.
- In comparison with other London boroughs the median satisfaction score was 37% with the range between 24% and 54%.
- The Repairs satisfaction in 2019 was 28% it was now 24% in 2024.
- Camden was at the bottom of the range and Camden had gone backwards since 2019.

The Chair commented that this was not surprising based on the findings from the work of the Cabinet Advisor on Improving Services for Camden Leaseholders and leaseholders' collective experiences over the past 5 years.

She had asked the Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income to find out which borough had got 54% and have a discussion with that borough, and also asked that the survey be conducted again in 2 years' time.

The Forum was informed that the detail behind the figures would be made available in June or July which could then be shared.

Action: Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income

Councillor Adams invited to comment by the chair, remarked that a debt of gratitude was owed to the Leaseholders Forum for highlighting the problems with Camden Housing in general and raising concerns when things were not going as well as they should be. He expressed his support for Councillor Slater's report congratulating the Leader of the Council for commissioning it and Councillor Slater for an excellent report, remarking that the only criticism he had of the report was that there appeared

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to be a disconnect with tenants' problems which were similar to leaseholders. He however expressed the view that the combined effect of the Leaseholders Forum and Councillor Slater's report was a benefit to Camden Housing.

There was general consensus among Forum members that the Leaseholder Forum served as an early warning system for the Council when things were not quite right.

Resident Action Day

The new Communications member advised that this had been deferred to sometime in September she would let the Forum know once she had a confirmed date.[later confirmed as 28 Sep]

Camden's Digital Transformation

The Leaseholder Services Working Group member informed the forum that various Camden departments were working with the Camden IT department, which was not fit for purpose.

What had been identified through liaison work with the Leaseholder Services Team was that the team were unable to process multiple touch points, they were unable to log and track an enquiry because it went off to different teams who had different systems which were not unified. He commented that the IT department was not using standard project documentation, project specification, design or development specifications and was of the view that departments such as Leaseholder Services were hamstrung by poorly designed systems and disconnection between the various departments. Raising the question who was managing the systems and until this was resolved the same problems would continue to occur.

12. ENERGY

David Hart provided the Forum with some background information, advising that the issue with energy bills had come about when a leaseholder had queried whether tenants heating bills had been subsidised by leaseholders. The Leaseholder had put in a number of Freedom of Information requests to the Council, the Council's response had appeared to alleviate those concerns.

The Leaseholder Services Manager explained that Leaseholders connected to a communal heating system received bills which included a number of items such as, gas and electricity consumption, insurance for the boiler, any ad hoc repairs and maintenance. Gas and electricity consumption was based on the actual bills received from the Energy Company for the system Leaseholders were connected to. Leaseholders did not subsidise any other heating systems or any other residents connected to the heating systems. Leaseholders paid their share of the cost of any gas, electricity and repairs used for that heating system.

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Emma Cardoso (Strategic Finance Lead) explained that tenants charges were calculated in a different way and the confusion may have been due to the report she wrote to cabinet where she referred to residents rather than tenants. She informed the Forum that some tenants were connected to the district heating system who were on meters. Those tenants not on meters were part of a pool, where all the gas, electricity and some running costs were lumped together and apportioned out based on tenant's bedroom sizes and also whether or not their system was 24 hours a day. There were different scales which could be found at the back of the Cabinet report which explained how much they were charged.

Tenants did not get actualisation like leaseholders, once they had been given their scale, they paid according to that which was not changed until the following year.

The Forum thanked the Strategic Finance Lead for attending the meeting and her explanation.

13. REPAIRS

Consideration was given to the Repairs Working Group report.

David Hart informed the Forum that if anybody had any questions on the report, they could write to Camden Leaseholders Forum camden@leaseholdersforum.org.uk

He also advised that the Council had invited the Repairs Working Group to see how the Repairs Team worked and also get involved in testing of the new Repairs reporting system which was replacing the reporting system on the Camden Account.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was none.

15. TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING

Committee room 1 Camden Town Hall, Wednesday 18 September 7pm.

The meeting ended at 9.02 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END