

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **MONDAY, 7TH OCTOBER, 2024** at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Kemi Atolagbe (Chair), Richard Cotton, Eddie Hanson and Nancy Jirira and Charles Bertlin, Larissa Hope and Victor Seedman (co-opted members)

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Meric Apak, Tommy Gale and Samata Khatoon

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Sagal Abdi-Wali, Cabinet Member Better Homes

The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Meric Apak and Tommy Gale.

It was noted that Councillor Lorraine Revah would be substituting for Councillor Tommy Gale.

2. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF STATUTORY DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS, COMPULSORY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND VOLUNTARY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS IN MATTERS ON THIS AGENDA

There were none.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Broadcast of the meeting

The Chair announced that the meeting was being broadcast live by the Council to the Internet and could be viewed on the website for twelve months after the meeting.

After that time, webcasts were archived and could be made available upon request. Those who had asked to address the meeting were deemed to be consenting to having their contributions recorded and broadcast and to the use of those sound recordings and images for webcasting and/or training purposes.

Supplementary Agenda

The Chair advised the meeting that there was a supplementary agenda that contained the report regarding the response to the Cabinet Adviser's report on Leaseholders.

Re-ordering the agenda

The Chair advised the meeting that she would be taking item 8 before item 7.

Joint letter from faith leaders

The words written by Imam Qari Muhammad Asim MBE, Chair, Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board, The Most Reverend Justin Welby Archbishop of Canterbury, and Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis regarding the 7th October attacks and the start of the war in Gaza and beyond, were read out at the meeting.

4. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT

There were none.

5. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2024.

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

6. DEPUTATIONS

There were none.

7. REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING - TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Property Management

Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, took the meeting through the report and he along with Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The Housing Scrutiny Committee would at its next meeting have a report on Landlord Services which would enable the committee to have a wider discussion regarding the Council's approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour. The report would seek to include comparative year's data regarding anti-social behaviour, information on the reporting process for complex cases, the number and types of housing anti-social behaviour cases that had been taken to court, and an outline of the training programme. Officers agreed to append the anti-social behaviour policy to the report along with sending them a copy in advance of the meeting.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing (MJ)

- The Tenant Satisfaction Measures seem to have had identified that Camden maybe recording anti-social behaviour differently from other local authorities, with Camden allowing the tenant to self-identify as having suffered from this. This might have meant that more issues were included in Camden's definition of Anti-Social Behaviour, which in turn had meant its figures were higher.
- Camden's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy had been co-produced with its tenants and residents, and would clearly identify what services would be taking the lead on dealing with the issues as set out in the criteria identified. This would also cover when an issue would need to be escalated for more senior colleagues to get involved.
- Officers would provide information regarding whether officers in the Community Safety Team dealing with anti-social behaviour had been trained or had a mental health background.

ACTION BY: Director of Public Safety

- Housing officers worked closely with colleagues in social care and public health when dealing with mental health issues relating to anti-social behaviour. A pilot had been trialled to look at dealing with complex cases in targeted estates and areas, and this had now been consolidated with the team running this approach being made permanent.
- Following the restructuring of Landlord Services, officers would be required to undertake appropriate housing services training that would include issues like trauma.

- Officers would ensure that staff always undertook conversions with tenants in safe spaces that could not be overheard by others when dealing with confidential issues.
- Officers would ensure that future reports provided a Camden housing tenure context (e.g. number in temporary accommodation and sheltered housing) in relation to the borough as a whole so the data sample could be compared to the numbers in each type of tenure.
- All landlords used the same methodology in relation to obtaining the Tenant Management Survey data. The Housing Regulator would be undertaking its own benchmarking, using its own methodology and they would be doing their own analysis of the information provided by all local authorities.
- The Council was still awaiting the final report of the Housing Ombudsman.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

8. UPDATE ON HOUSING REPAIRS AND CAPITAL WORKS

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Property Management

Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, took the meeting through the report and he along with Susanne Afra, Head of Capital Works, Tony Castle, Head of Repairs, and Scot Reid Head of Property, Customer Services and Engagement, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The Council was working with the Skills Centre in Euston, to seek to ensure more people took up apprentices in the housing trades the borough needed, to ensure that they were high quality operatives to undertake those roles in the future.
- In relation to the works on the Weedington Estate, officers engaged with residents regarding the works to be undertaken in their property, had show flats available to be viewed by tenants, provided documentation informing them of what was happening, had resident engagement sessions to advise tenants on the progress of the works, had an experienced project manager overseeing the project, the contractor had a resident liaison officer based on site throughout the project, worked closely with the neighbour housing staff and when vulnerable tenants were made to them worked to ensure that they were provided with the required assistance. Even with all this support and information a number of tenants had not though allowed the contractors access to their homes. The position on lack of access had now changed with these tenants now reaching out to the contractor, and as result of this the Council was now developing a mopping up programme to finish the required works. During this period those tenants who had not allowed the contractor access had been offered electric heaters until the works had been completed.

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- When necessary the Council did offer vulnerable tenants a packing service that would help pack and unpack their belongings during works. Officers would contact anyone that the councillors identified who may need of this service.
- Officers would provide tenants and residents with an update regarding West End Siding's Estate heating project.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (SA)

- Officers would provide an update regarding the specific grant funding that had been secured for sustainability work over the last few years.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (GH)

- Officers had processes in place that provided information regarding lift performance so that appropriate action could be taken to deal with issues when they broke down, along with having information on the lifts overall reliability over time. As part of this officers had now started a process of sending text messages to tenants and residents, where they were sent information when a lift had broken down, then regular updates until the lift was working and when available, why the lift had broken down in the first place. Officers would also seek to contact vulnerable tenants and residents to see how they could be supported whilst the lift was out of order. This approach would now be taken forward in relation to heating system breakdowns.
- Officers would produce a paper for the next DMC cycle regarding the application process for CCTV on estates, along with the installation criteria and the need for tenants and residents to support paying the on-going service charge attached to the installation costs.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management

- The Council had experienced clerks of works who assessed the quality of contractor's works to ensure that the work was delivered to the Council standards, and in-line with the scope they had been set. The work they did was especially important when this related to specialist work around fire doors installation and electrical works. Programme Managers in the Capital Works Teams were highly experienced and were able to assess the work of the clerk of works and contractors. The whole assessment process allowed for checks and balances in the system to enable the project to be delivered to a decent standard for tenants and residents. As a result of this work, the number of complaints regarding capital works project delivery remained low but officers would look into any specific issues that councillors may wish to share with them separately.

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- An on-site resident liaison officer was present on projects to ensure tenants and residents understood what works would be undertaken, and when necessary work with them to enable entry to their homes.
- The WhatsApp repairs reporting process sought to ask a series of questions and determined on the basis of those answers, whether they needed to speak to an operator and or whether the matter should be deemed an emergency. The Council offered a telephone service for emergencies and enhanced residents and for those who had no ability to report repairs other than by the telephone. Work was always on going at adapting processes to ensure that the tenants and residents journey when reporting repairs was as smooth as possible.
- Digital reporting methods were a very popular way for tenants and residents to report issues, along with allowing for a quicker call waiting response to telephone calls. Having officers answering calls was a resource intensive process but it was important that they were there for the people who needed them. The approach already taken forward by the repairs service was soon to be taken forward by Contact Camden.
- The Camden Account was also being improved so that it became another way for tenants and residents to report repairs issues, and would have a supportive live-chat function to help tenants and residents report a repair when necessary.
- Data on the very good response times for the repairs service was available on the Council's website. Though 85% of all repairs jobs were raised on-line, over 50% of the service's activities were still done via the telephone. This service was still available for those who could not use the technology, for emergencies, for enhanced tenants or for those who could not do anything else online. All telephone calls were recorded and officers were able to go back and listen to calls to check on what the whole experience was. Officers would go back and listen to any calls that councillors could identify where the person having made a call had a bad experience.
- Works performance data was regularly assessed by officers and this included information on repeat issues. Future reports would provided comparative data regarding performance, and this would include information on the number and types of repeat repairs call outs.
- Officers would update the Maitland Park TRA regarding progress on the proposed works.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (SA)

- A report was scheduled be submitted the Cabinet and Housing Scrutiny in December regarding the Council's future asset management strategy, that would identify the proposed programme.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

9. RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE CABINET ADVISER ON IMPROVING SERVICES TO CAMDEN LEASEHOLDERS AND ADVOCATING FOR LEASEHOLDERS

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Member Better Homes, as set out in the supplementary agenda.

Councillor Sagal Abdi-Wali, Cabinet Member Better Homes, took the meeting through the report and she along with Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing and Sean Scott, Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The service would be putting in place a Dispute Resolution Team that would seek to deal with difficult cases raised by leaseholders and stop issues escalating, once the Housing Transformation restructuring had been completed.
- The Private Renters Bill and the Leaseholder Reform Bill would both have an impact on future services in those areas. Prior to the legislation in these areas being enacted, the Council was seeking to take forward its own service improvements this included ensuring service charge bills accurately reflected the service the leaseholder had received.
- Leaseholder works billing regarding retrofitting could be complicated as some measures could be considered an improvement rather than maintenance works.
- Leaseholder bills did provide a breakdown of the charges that the leaseholder had to pay, where this was an estimate then the information would be less detailed and further information was available on request.
- All service charge bills were sent out in February based on estimated costs for the year ahead, and at the end of the financial year these were reassessed based on actual spend and then this was rectified with the leaseholder. The bill would provide a breakdown of charges along with an overall summary, with further information regarding the expenditure being available from Leaseholder Services. For major works then the leaseholder would be sent an itemised account but following the views of leaseholders, the service was reviewing how this information could be better shared with leaseholders. Leaseholder Services also offered surgeries and advice sessions where staff could go through issues with leaseholders.
- As part of the improvement programme Leaseholder Services would be looking at its evidence and record keeping so that more detailed information was available to leaseholders through the Camden Account.
- Camden did have a number of payment options and terms that were available to leaseholders whose circumstances had changed. This could also mean placing a charge on the property so that the bill did not need to be paid until the home was sold.

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- Leaseholders could not automatically revert their leaseholder into becoming a Council tenant again, but the Council would always work with individuals to help them through challenging circumstances.
- Leaseholder Services would seek to work with leaseholders in relation to concerns they had regarding bills that they sought to challenge regarding issues like disrepair.
- Camden's capital works programme was published on its open data site so that information was available to leaseholders regarding future schemes the Council was seeking to undertake. A report was scheduled to be submitted to the Cabinet and the Housing Scrutiny Committee for the December/January cycle regarding the Council's overall Asset Management Strategy that would outline the works that needed to be done, along with how they could be funded.
- Leaseholder Services had to go through a service redesign in order for it to take forward the recommendations identified in the Cabinet Adviser's report along with other service improvements. This service redesign required a service restructure, and this was part of the overall housing transformation restructure that was now ready to take forward from November this year. An action plan had been developed with the Leaseholder Forum, a number of which had already been taken forward, and it was expected that the changes would lead to better service provision for leaseholders in the future. Updates in relation to the development of the action plan could be provided to members if they wished. These measures should reassure leaseholders that service changes were happening and would be delivered.
- From January 2025 the Housing Department was proposing to undertake a re-induction of all housing staff. This would provide staff with clarity regarding expectations, refresher information on housing and tenancy law, along with appropriate training. This undertaking would allow the authority to professionalise the service as required by the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.
- All housing and property services would be seeking to work closely together to ensure the best quality outcomes for all the Council's tenants and leaseholders.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

10. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Property Management.

The scrutiny committee asked that the following matters be added to the provisional work programme, along with the further information required regarding items:

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- Outcome from the Council meeting on 14th October regarding the themed debate on Private Rented Sector (yet to be programmed)
- TSM Housing Regulator update (yet to be programmed)
- Housing Ombudsman report on the Council when available (yet to be programmed)

The scrutiny committee asked that a copy of Housing's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy be circulated to members in advance of the November meeting.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing

Also the scrutiny committee asked officers to ensure that the information requested at the July meeting regarding the Homelessness Scrutiny Panel update on voluntary and community sector contracts and out of hours provision, was included in the update report going to the November meeting.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing (SM)

Programme of meetings 2024/25 (new items and information requests in bold)

12th November

- Housing & Repairs Transformation Programme
- Landlord Services update on: Anti-social Behaviour Policy, Estate Parking Report, Feedback from Tenancy Visits, Voids lettings, policy on dangerous dogs
- Landlord Licensing Scheme (also covering conditions of homes and enforcement action)
- Homelessness Scrutiny Panel Officer Update **(to include update on voluntary and community sector contracts and out of hours provision)**
- Rough Sleeping Services Review Update
- Cabinet Member Better Homes update
- Work Programme

10th December

- Asset Management Strategy (Cabinet Report)
- Procurement Strategy for a Retrofit at Scale Pilot (Cabinet Report)
- Allocations Policy Report
- HRA Budgeting Report
- Insight, Learning and Impact Report (Quarter 2 2024/5)
- Cabinet Member Better Homes update
- Work Programme

13th January 2025

- HRA Budget & Rent Review 24/25
- CIP annual report
- Domestic Abuse Report Update
- Cabinet Member Better Homes update
- Work Programme

25th February

- Housing Associations Annual Performance Report
- Cabinet Member Better Homes Annual Report
- Work programme

Yet to be programmed

- **Council 14th October 24 – response on themed debate on private renter sector housing.**
- **TSM Housing Regulator update**
- **Housing Ombudsman report**

RESOLVED –

THAT the report work programme be revised as outlined above.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There were none.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END