

MINUTES

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COUNCIL OF THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN HELD AT COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HALL, JUDD STREET, LONDON WC1H 9JE AT 6.00 PM MONDAY, 20TH JANUARY, 2025

MEMBERS PRESENT

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Eddie Hanson (in the Chair), and Councillors

Sagal Abdi-Wali	Nasrine Djemai	Liam Martin-Lane
Steve Adams	Rebecca Filer	Sylvia McNamara
Meric Apak	Sabrina Francis	Shah Miah
Ajok Athian	Edmund Frondigoun	Awale Olad
Kemi Atolagbe	Julian Fulbrook	Richard Olszewski
Joseph Ball	Tommy Gale	Nazma Rahman
Lotis Bautista	Sharon Hardwick	Lorna Jane Russell
Marcus Boyland	Adam Harrison	Nadia Shah
Anna Burrage	Nancy Jirira	Tom Simon
Patricia Callaghan	Heather Johnson	James Slater
Linda Chung	Matthew Kirk	Nanouche Umeadi
Matt Cooper	Patricia Leman	Sue Vincent
Nina De Ayala Parker	Izzy Lenga	Anna Wright
Judy Dixey	Rishi Madlani	

MEMBERS ABSENT

Councillors Samata Khatoon, Nasim Ali, Camron Aref-Adib, Richard Cotton, Lorna Greenwood, Jenny Headlam-Wells, Jenny Mulholland, Andrew Parkinson, Lorraine Revah, Jonathan Simpson, Stephen Stark, Robert Thompson and Shiva Tiwari

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 Council and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.

1. 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 no declarations of interest.

2. SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE MAYOR, THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OR OTHER RELEVANT OFFICERS, AND ANY OTHER MEMBERS WHO THE MAYOR HAS AGREED MAY MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT

Broadcast of the meeting

The Deputy Mayor announced that the meeting was being broadcast live to the Internet and may be filmed by members of the press or public. Those speaking at the meeting were deemed to be agreeing to being recorded and broadcast.

Procedure in relation to Item 5

The Chair proposed, and the Council agreed, the following procedure for consideration of Item 5 on the agenda:-

- Councillor Simon to have 5 minutes to explain why his group had asked for the extraordinary meeting.
- 30 minutes for questions and comments from Members, with each speaker being allowed up to 5 minutes.
- 5 minutes for the Cabinet Member for Better Homes to close the debate.

3. COMMUNICATIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ali, Aref-Adib, Cotton, Headlam-Wells, Khatoon, Mulholland, Simpson and Tiwari. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillors Boyland, Greenwood, Revah and Thompson.

4. DEPUTATIONS AND PETITIONS

The Deputy Mayor announced that there had been one deputation request in respect of the meeting, but this had been declined as it was received after the deadline for submission of deputation requests and there would be opportunity to request a deputation to the Housing Scrutiny Committee on this topic shortly.

5. REQUEST FOR AN EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING

In line with the procedure agreed under Item 2, Councillor Simon addressed the Council and explained why the Liberal Democrat Group had requested an extraordinary meeting of the Council, as summarised in the report on the agenda.

Members of the Council then made comments as summarised below:-

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- The situation with the housing repairs service had been going on for much too long and the Housing Ombudsman had now found poor communication and systemic inefficiency.
- Reporting on complaints annually to the Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee was insufficient to address the scale of the issue and the Council should publish all adjudications, as well as its response to the Ombudsman's findings, on its website.
- The Housing Scrutiny Committee had undertaken considerable scrutiny of housing services and had made a number of recommendations that had since been taken forward.
- The Housing Scrutiny Committee had requested a report on the Ombudsman's findings to its January Committee but the Council was still working with the Ombudsman on its responses to the recommendations at that point and so it was not the right time to take a report.
- Had there been any analysis of the data on complaints relating to housing and were there any initial findings?
- Some residents were using the complaints process instead of the normal reporting routes so work was needed to prevent the complaints system becoming the default way of engaging with the Council.
- Some of the cases referenced by the Ombudsman related to vulnerable residents and those with disabilities. What action was being taken to improve support for these residents and would proposals be taken to the Disability Oversight Panel?
- Initiatives like Residents Action Days and tenants' conferences were important tools for enabling the Council to see issues from the perspective of residents and enabling those residents to feel involved in the plans to improve their properties. How could these kinds of events be embedded into the culture of the housing department moving forward.
- There had been a noticeable improvement in communications in relation to faults and repairs recently.
- The current culture around repairs was too complacent and led to work having to be repeated.
- Why was there not already a system to log and monitor repairs to make sure that they were carried out in a timely way?
- Successive Cabinet Members had worked hard to manage the decline of the Council's housing stock but this had been made more difficult as a result of changes and reforms undertaken by previous governments. It had been almost impossible to invest in housing stock and there had been significant staff reductions, making it difficult to provide an adequate service and respond to complaints in a timely manner.
- There would be no quick fix to the problem of social housing across the country. It would take a culture change and a renewed respect for social housing.
- Leaseholders were also impacted by inadequacies in the complaints and repairs systems and the leaseholder satisfaction scores reflected this, but work was taking place to implement the recommendations of last year's Cabinet Adviser report on Improving Services to Leaseholders, alongside other work to transform

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the housing service, improve accountability for contractors and improve communication between the Council and residents.

- The Cabinet Member and officers were working at speed to improve housing services, but there were serious funding and regulatory pressures in the system which impacted on the ability to effect change.
- What more could Camden do to lobby government for more investment in social housing?
- Camden's poor record on repairs and complaints was failing residents and the Council should consider bringing the repairs service in-house.
- Missed appointments was an ongoing issue and was causing residents to lose wages while waiting at home for contractors who did not arrive. Repairs contracts needed to have penalty clauses inserted for failure to attend in order to address this.
- Other councils had managed their services without the criticisms that had been levelled at Camden.
- Many residents valued a personal relationship with a neighbourhood officer who knew them and their area and found this was key to matters being dealt with in the timely way. Was the Council moving towards or away from such a model?
- The Council had aging housing stock, some of which had become so dilapidated that it was not able to repair it.
- The role of district managers as the eyes and ears of the service had been overlooked and it was not clear if this was recognised in the transformation programme.
- The Council could not address the issues with the housing repairs service on its own. It required a government willing to work in partnership as relying only on rental income to plug the funding gap was not sustainable.
- Despite the challenges faced over recent years, the Council had made progress in tackling damp and mould issues and had invested in a new IT system to manage repairs and help the service to be more agile. There was of course much more to be done, but much good work had already taken place.
- The Council should consider speaking to Think and Do about training young people to do basic repairs on estates, giving them the opportunity to learn useful life skills whilst dealing with some of the simpler jobs.
- Ward councillors would find it useful to know when there were lift repair issues in their ward and what the expected timescale for resolution was.
- The Council was aware that there was an issue with the repairs service and significant dissatisfaction amongst tenants and leaseholders, and it was of course important to make improvements, although this had to be done in a context of a significant loss of funding over recent years.
- The Ombudsman had acknowledged that Camden had engaged extensively with the investigation and had proactively sought to implement the recommendations and learn from them.
- The Council engaged with tenants in a wide range of ways, including residents panels, the Housing and Fire Safety Panel, the Customer Satisfaction Survey, the District Management Committees and the Leaseholders' Forum.

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Councillor Abdi-Wali, the Cabinet Member for Better Homes, acknowledged the significance of the Ombudsman's report, which highlighted areas for improvement with a focus on complaint handling and repairs. Action was already being taken, with the goal of ensuring that all Camden residents received prompt and effective responses. In response to some of the questions and comments, she made the following points:-

- The Council was working closely with the new government as part of a coalition of 100 local authorities working on a report addressing how to make real changes to how social housing was funded.
- There had been an increase in complaints over the last year, but this was also the picture at a national level.
- The defensive complaints culture that the Ombudsman identified was being addressed.
- Two officers had been appointed to improve data collection and analysis in order to identify and understand trends.
- The issues around vulnerable residents identified by the Ombudsman had led to the drafting of a vulnerability policy that would be considered by the Disability Oversight Panel and would shortly be published.
- The issues raised by the Ombudsman's report would be considered by the Housing Scrutiny Committee at its February meeting.
- The wider housing transformation programme had been considered extensively by the Scrutiny Committee.
- She agreed with the points made about the need for more resident engagement work and the importance of culture change to make the service more resident focussed, and work was already well underway as had been noted by some Members.
- It took most apprentices about three years to learn the skills needed to undertake work in Council properties, so it was not a simple matter to train local young people to undertake repairs work.
- A monthly ward councillor report was circulated by the tenant participation team and residents now received updates in relation to issues such as lift breakdowns.
- The challenges faced had to be looked at in the broader context of a complex and aging housing portfolio and a significant fall in funding, plus a waiting list of 8000 families and an increase in homelessness. The need to prioritise essential safety works also meant a longer waiting time for non-urgent works.
- The Housing Investment Strategy recently agreed by the Cabinet would play a key role in addressing the underlying issues and enabling the Council to provide good quality homes for its residents in the medium and long term.

The meeting ended at 6.53pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END