

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **CAMDEN TOWN DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE** held on **WEDNESDAY, 9TH JANUARY, 2019** at 6.30 pm in the Crowndale Centre, 218 Eversholt Street, London, NW1 1BD

REGISTERED DMC MEMBERS PRESENT

Fran Heron (Chair)	Amphill Square TRA	Sherryl Murphy	Mayford TRA
Steve Christofi	Regent's Park TA	David Perris	CASP
Eileen Ennis	Crofters Way TRA	Wendy Priolo	Coopers Lane TRA
Sheila James	Mayford TRA	Marie O'Shea	Amphill Square TRA
Stephen Kelly	Three Fields TRA	John Wood	Walker House TRA
Pat McNicholas	Regent's Park TA		

OTHER RESIDENTS PRESENT

Sandra Jija	Three Fields TRA	June Williams	Mayford TRA
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COUNCILLOR OBSERVERS PRESENT

Councillors Samata Khatoon, Roger Robinson and Paul Tomlinson

COUNCILLOR OBSERVERS ABSENT

Councillors Nasim Ali, Heather Johnson and Andrew Parkinson

OFFICERS PRESENT

Neil Simcock Head of Finance – Supporting Communities

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 Camden Town District Management Committee and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.

MINUTES

1. REGISTRATION OF TENANTS ASSOCIATIONS AND CO-OPTION OF TENANT REPRESENTATIVES

The DMC noted the list of registered TRAs and their representatives as at Appendix A and those TRAs whose membership had lapsed as at Appendix B.

RESOLVED –

THAT the list of registered TRAs and their representatives be noted.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Barbara Seckington, John Seckington (both Agar Grove TMO), Wolfram Westendorf (Godwin and Crowndale TMO) and Isabel Sanda (Bridgeway Street TRA).

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were none.

4. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

There were none.

5. NOTIFICATIONS OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT

There was no urgent business.

6. PART A - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET AND RENT REVIEW 2019/20 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Housing Support Services, together with a presentation by Jason Blackhurst, Housing Revenue Account Strategic Accountant. A copy of the presentation was tabled at the meeting.

The DMCs were informed that the Council was required to agree a balanced HRA budget for each year. This year the budgetary context for the medium term was again challenging with the Council needing resources to meet three key priorities; 1) building homes; 2) maintaining high quality housing stock; and 3) delivering a new standard in resident safety. The Government had not responded sufficiently to these challenges, and since April 2016 had imposed rent reductions of 1% resulting in the need for savings, simply to balance the HRA Budget.

District Management Committees (DMCs) were invited to express a view on the proposed 1% rent reduction; service charges; heating changes; a new CCTV service to be funded from a new service charge and any other proposals. These comments would then be reported to the meetings of the Housing Scrutiny Committee and the Council's Cabinet.

He also advised the meeting that the 2018/19 week charge for the Responsive Patrol Service would be 61 pence and not the 53 pence indicated in the report.

Councillor Meric Apak, Cabinet Member for Better Homes, then thanked Jason Blackhurst for his presentation.

Councillor Meric Apak, Rhys Makinson, Director of Housing Support Services, and Jason Blackhurst gave the following key responses to questions:

- The Council had been charging tenants on behalf of Thames Water but had not been making any profit through the provision of this service. Thames Water had now decided to take back this service and would be charging tenants directly from April 2019.
- It was not anticipated that tenants water bills would change following this change, and Thames Water may have offers in place that would allow tenants to pay less than they were currently doing. Though this would now be up to individual tenants to engage with Thames Water on directly.
- The Council had put in place provisions to help elderly and vulnerable tenants navigate through the change to ensure that they were not disadvantaged. Thames Water were also setting up a team to deal with telephone enquiries from tenants at the same time, and they would be sending out a letter to tenants directly on the service change.
- Any tenants who were in credit in relation to their Camden water bill by the end of the financial year could receive a rebate of the amount on request.
- The Council's procurement strategy for gas supplies included buying gas in advance from the wholesale markets, to even out fluctuations in wholesale prices. The Council did this as part of a consortium of other local authorities, which allowed those authorities to get a better deal from the market. This had enabled tenants and residents to benefit from this arrangement and allowed on this occasion for the heating pool to have a surplus, and heating charges to be frozen. This has enabled the Council to either reinvest the money into energy efficiency measures or offer tenants a rebate.
- The Council would use the increased service charges to ensure that the cost of existing services were fully covered following inflationary pressures. Any concerns in relation to the performance of services should be raised directly, so that they could be looked at either at operational or at policy development levels.
- The Council's Caretaking Service was currently going through a review and a special meeting was being held on 11th January, where tenants would be able to feed in their suggestions for taking the service forward.

The DMCs then went into their respective meetings to discuss the options available to them on the budget as outlined in the presentation.

7. PART B - DMC BUDGET PROPOSAL DISCUSSIONS

The Chair summarised the issues raised in the report and earlier debate and highlighted that although the annual meeting was known as 'rent-setting', the Cabinet would make the decisions. In the past, it was felt the DMCs had been ignored but she commended Councillor Meric Apak, Cabinet Member for Better Homes, for trying to change this.

Responding to questions, Neil Simcock, Head of Finance – Supporting Communities, outlined that the savings outlined in the presentation had been agreed as part of the previous medium term financial strategy a few years previously and were essentially as a result of the forced reduction in rents.

The Chair remarked that in light of the current focus of works on fire safety it may be pertinent to consider a fire safety service charge. The Cabinet Member confirmed that the £80million grant from the Government was entirely to pay to replace the cladding and curtain walls on the Chalcots estate; this would not cover the replacement windows or the costs of the emergency evacuation.

The additional and separate £87million for fire safety works would cover new and additional fire risk assessments and any works arising from those. These would include street properties. The Head of Finance – Supporting Communities advised that the capital programme had shifted towards fire safety largely at the expense of the Better Homes programme, but the Council would be aiming to combine other fire safety works with other works as far as possible. It was agreed that officers would provide a response outlining who was responsible for undertaking fire risk assessments, whether internal, contractors or a mix.

ACTION: Andrew Butt, Head of Fire Safety and H&S Delivery

The DMC then discussed the rent levels and fees and charges proposed for 2019/20.

Decreasing rents by 1%

The DMC noted that decreasing rents by 1% for 2019/20 was compulsory under the Government's rules, but there would be discretion for the Council in the years following.

RESOLVED –

THAT Camden Town DMC oppose the requirement to reduce Council rents by 1% for 2019/20.

Service charges

The Chair commented that it might be useful to combine all the relevant service charges into a combined resident safety and security charge to make it easier for people to understand how the service charges were being used towards matters concerning resident safety. Noting that a Responsive Security Patrol contract monitoring group had been promised and appeared to have been reneged on, and wider concerns about spending of Housing Revenue Account money on safety and security, the Chair proposed that the DMC's recommendations on safety and security related service charges be subject to establishing a resident oversight panel to monitor expenditure.

RESOLVED –

THAT Camden Town DMC recommend that all safety and security charges be combined into a single charge with a resident oversight panel to monitor expenditure.

Caretaking – increase by 2.4%

The Head of Finance – Supporting Communities confirmed that the proposed increase was inflationary.

The Chair highlighted the ongoing caretaking review and encouraged DMC members to attend the workshop on Friday 11th January 2019.

On being put to the vote it was unanimously:

RESOLVED –

THAT Camden Town DMC recommend an increase of 2.4% in the caretaking service charge for 2019/20.

CCTV – 98p in 2019/20 and £2.10 for new system following implementation

Officers confirmed that the intention for 2019/20 was to retain the current £0.98 CCTV service charge. If the Council proceeded with the upgrade to the CCTV system, then following the completion of the planned upgrades, the service charge would increase to £2.10 per week to fund this. Once the costs of the upgrade had been paid for the charge could be reduced.

DMC members commented that if the enhanced CCTV system was agreed, then there needed to be guarantees about its effectiveness. The resident oversight panel would help ensure this. It was also noted the £2.10 service charge would likely increase in line with inflation in following years.

On being put to the vote it was, with 8 votes in favour, none against and 2 abstentions:

RESOLVED –

THAT Camden Town DMC recommend no change to the current £0.98 service charge for CCTV for 2019/20 and an increase to £2.10 following the completion of the planned investment to pay for the enhanced CCTV system, subject to establishment of a resident oversight panel to monitor expenditure.

Communal lighting – increase by 2.4%

The Chair commented that lighting was a safety consideration and could potentially be included in the combined safety and security service charge. On being put to the vote it was unanimously:

RESOLVED –

THAT Camden Town DMC recommend a 2.4% increase in the communal lighting service charge, subject to establishment of a resident oversight panel to monitor expenditure.

Communal mechanical and engineering maintenance – increase by 2.4%

The Cabinet Member outlined that the mechanical and electrical service charge was to cover works to heating, electrical or other mechanical elements in communal areas. Officers could provide a detailed breakdown in due course.

ACTION BY: Andy Hardwick, Head of Repairs and Operations

The Chair remarked that it may be that this classed as a safety related charge in the DMC's proposed combined safety and security service charge.

On being put to the vote it was, with 7 votes in favour, none against and 3 abstentions:

RESOLVED –

THAT Camden Town DMC recommend a 2.4% increase in the communal mechanical and engineering service charge, subject to establishment of a resident oversight panel to monitor expenditure.

Grounds maintenance – no increase

The Head of Finance – Supporting Communities confirmed the grounds maintenance service charge could be frozen due to efficiencies having been identified.

Responsive Security Patrol – increase by 2.9%

The DMC discussed the current state of the Responsive Security Patrol and raised concerns about its effectiveness, commenting that it had worked well for a few months after its relaunch in 2018 though had since declined. DMC members stated that they had irrelevantly been asked to identify themselves as tenants or leaseholders when calling the service.

On being put to the vote it was, with 7 votes in favour, none against and 3 abstentions:

RESOLVED –

THAT Camden Town DMC recommend a 2.4% increase in the Responsive Security Patrol service charge, subject to establishment of a resident oversight panel to monitor expenditure.

Heating pool

DMC members discussed the options around the heating pool surplus and service charges. DMC members expressed their keenness to invest the surplus in energy efficiency works but noted service charges would have to rise if that approach was taken. The value-for-money of the new gas supply contract was also queried. The Head of Finance – Supporting Communities outlined that there was energy efficiency work undertaken as part of wider HRA investment.

After discussion, it was, with 8 votes in favour, none against and 2 abstentions:

RESOLVED –

THAT Camden Town DMC recommend that the heating pool surplus be used to freeze the current level of service charge.

The Chair concluded by outlining continued concerns over the operation of the Tenant Participation Service, both in terms of the functions of the service and concerns that officers in the team appeared demoralised. She proposed and the DMC agreed that a special meeting to discuss the Service was needed.

ACTION BY: Graeme Beedham, Head of Tenant Participation and Sheltered Housing

8. PART C - DMC COMMENTS

The DMC then adjourned and reconvened in the Council Chamber and the decisions of all five DMCs were noted and would be submitted to the Housing Scrutiny Committee on 14th January 2019 and Cabinet on 16th January 2019 for consideration.

Councillor Apak advised the meeting that having heard the concerns of tenants in relation to the changes to water charges he would hold a special meeting that would seek to address these issues. Officers would seek to ensure that a representative of Thames Water was in attendance to answer questions, along with having information on how the Council would be supporting tenants (especially the elderly, disabled and vulnerable) through the change.

This meeting would take place at the end of January or early February 2019.

ACTION BY: Mary McGowan, Director of Housing Management

Councillor Meric Apak then thanked all the DMC representatives for attending the meeting and giving the Council their views.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END