

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Transformation of Housing services	
REPORT OF Director of Housing	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Housing Scrutiny Committee	DATE 12.12.22
<p>SUMMARY OF REPORT The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Council's plan to transform its housing services.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing</p>	
<p>RECOMMENDATION</p> <p>That the Housing Scrutiny Committee notes the progress made on the transformation of Camden housing services.</p>	

Signed: 
Director of Housing

Date: 1st December 2022

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Council's plan to transform its housing services which commenced with a top tier review of management. The report also outlines how the proposals to restructure and redesign services will improve the resident experience as well as specific interventions that are being undertaken to address underperformance.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Council is keen to improve the resident experience across all housing services. Performance has been under scrutiny for the past year and several issues have been highlighted: high levels of sickness, poor void turnaround and poor rental income collection. There are also issues relating to customer satisfaction. We are committed to an ambitious programme of transformation that seeks to address issues around finance, performance, culture, staff empowerment and most importantly, resident experience. Outlined in this report are three crucial areas that will contribute to addressing these issues.

3. Service Area review

- 3.1 Residents have told us that they do not feel services are joined up across the council, and that there is a need for greater alignment between teams to ensure collaboration in the delivery of services. Through reviewing service areas, Camden will be better positioned to meet its housing ambitions by working in a solution-focused way. Services working closer together will also be better placed to empower staff in front line roles. They are in turn, more likely to make decisions that are in the best interests of the resident and the community.

- 3.2 In May 2022 a Director of Housing Services was appointed, as an amalgamation of the two previously distinct Director roles for a) Housing Management and b) Housing Support Services. Within these Divisions were the following Service areas:

- Landlord Services
- Estates Management
- Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement / Sheltered Accommodation
- Leaseholder Services
- Voids Programme
- Temporary Accommodation
- Housing Commissioning and Partnerships
- Housing Needs

- 3.3 To better align services and achieve our housing ambitions, the new structure will consist of five service areas:

- Allocations, Lettings and Private Housing Services
- Neighbourhoods (Housing Services)
- Housing Solutions
- Leaseholder Services and Housing Income

- Innovation and Improvement

3.4 The new structure is due to go live in February 2023, where we will continue to review reporting arrangements and structures.

4. Interim Teams

- 4.1 Our performance data has shown that two areas where we are underperforming is the turnaround of void properties and income collections from tenants in rent arrears. In October 2022, we set up interim teams to focus immediately on improving these two areas. Neighbourhood Housing Managers and Officers have been redistributed to create fixed term 'specialist teams within the team'. The purpose is to have a rapid impact on these underperforming areas, amend work practices, and to learn lessons for future service design.
- 4.2 Creating these teams should not only reduce lost income in rent arrears and void property turnaround, but also allow space for existing Landlord Service staff to focus on delivering a holistic, neighbourhood model of working.
- 4.3 Whilst these teams have been set-up to be six-month fixed terms, they will be frequently reviewed to evaluate their performance and to decide if they should return to their original posts or should continue as specialist teams.

5. Tenancy Visits

- 5.1 The Covid-19 pandemic saw the number of face-to-face services reduce drastically, with many members of staff no longer fully based in their patches and instead working from home. Whilst this was necessary during the pandemic, we want to start reaching out to residents that we haven't engaged with since before the pandemic and have set ourselves the ambitious target of visiting every tenant in the next year.
- 5.2 Many tenants will not need our services, but we want to ensure that we are reaching out and asking residents how they are so we can pick up any concerns that they may have. Issues that might be raised and escalated include disrepairs, fire safety, overcrowding, safeguarding and cost of living. By reaching out in this way, we hope to identify issues quickly and early before they escalate.
- 5.3 Through setting up the interim teams and removing the responsibility for income collection and voids, remaining Neighbourhood Housing staff will have capacity to visit tenants and help resolve any issues they may face. As a result, patches will be reviewed and where there is a change in NHO, we will let residents know.

6. Measuring performance

- 6.1 Each service within Housing uses its own local metrics to inform their response, manage their and support their casework. From these, we have developed 35 'core' Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to help us monitor and improve areas of performance.
- 6.2 The indicators link to our purpose and what we are aiming to achieve for residents; and we are continuously capturing the relevant data we need that

indicate how we are performing against our ambition.

- 6.3 The most significant areas we are prioritising for improvement are represented within the KPIs included in appendix A of this paper. They are around homeless services, households in emergency, temporary accommodation, income collection, management of empty council homes, and complaints handling.
- 6.4 As well as the impact on residents of sub-optimal performance in key areas, there are budgetary challenges for Housing and improvement is critical. For example, the challenge and cost of finding temporary accommodation in the borough increases, with some providers and landlords leaving the market. This has resulted in the provision becoming more scarce and more expensive. In addition, the number of households in unsuitable housing awaiting an offer of a vacant council home and the rent loss while such homes are vacant, as well as the increasing industry costs of carrying out repairs and improvements to properties, all contribute to increasing financial challenges. There is also the loss of rental income through rising rent arrears which is exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis that is adding pressure to already very restricted household incomes.
- 6.5 Some of our performance framework and performance management work is still in development. We have identified and defined the measures; and in most cases attached targets to them. However, we need to refine some targets to ensure they are relevant to corporate objectives, specific, easy to understand, measurable, achievable, actionable by the team, and have timebound expectations against them. In addition, there will be work needed to embed our performance culture to the degree that performance conversations are expected, frequent and informed, the data is known, easily accessible and shared, we have plans for achieving our next milestones, we are confident in our analysis of the data, we know what is positively or negatively driving performance and are therefore able to put in place the necessary actions to sustain continued improvement.
- 6.7 We are guarding against over-complicated measures for measuring sake and over-complicated recording, only recording things because they are easy to count and thereby ignoring indicators that help us against our organisational objectives, shying away from what the data is revealing, having performance measures that inadvertently drive unhelpful behaviours. Our emerging culture of performance will include making sure that we pay attention to the various methods of receiving feedback from residents, tenants, service users and customers, and making sure that information and learning from customer-facing staff, complaints and customer service enquiries feed into our service improvement actions.

7. Finance Comments of the Executive Director of Corporate Services

- 7.1 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is facing a number of financial challenges which without action would result in an estimated £8m funding gap over the period 2023/24-2025/26. The Housing Transformation programme set out in this report is critical to the HRA's Medium Term Financial Strategy to close this gap. There are similar pressures in the Council's General Fund where homelessness services sit.

7.2 There are no resource implications arising for the Council. The service area review in section 3 will result in fewer Heads of Service and may identify further savings from the elimination of duplication from service delivery. The interim teams in section 4 should result in increased rental income from a reduction in void turnaround time and from reduced rent arrears. The tenancy visits programme in section 5 should have no net impact on budgets. The performance measures described in section 6 include measures which are directly related to the HRA's expenditure and income and should therefore help address the financial challenges it faces.

8. Legal comments of the Borough Solicitor

8.1 The Borough Solicitor has been consulted and has no comments to add.

6.1 Environmental Implications

6.2 There are none.

REPORT ENDS