

## **Clarion to provide a detailed response to the points raised in the Anonymous Deputation.**

We have reviewed the key points raised in the deputation and have provided a response to the questions asked. As the deputation is anonymised it has not been possible for our teams to carry out a detailed and in-depth review of the issues raised. We have provided our response in the order the questions were raised for ease of reference. Our response details our general practice.

### **Repairs and Maintenance**

**Point 1:** I would like Clarion to commit to insisting that all contractors operate on an appointment basis and to stop expecting tenants to allow access without notice.

We can confirm that our contractors do offer repair appointments to our customers with the exception of an emergency repair, in these cases we would advise we will attend imminently and within 24 hours.

Unfortunately, during the cyber incident Clarion could not provide a Business as Usual (BAU) service or use a number of our customer communication processes. An emergency service was put in place and during the period and despite system outage, Clarion completed 35,000 repairs nationally.

As of today we are almost back to BAU, we are presently completing 80% of reported repairs within 28 days, with the majority of appointments taking place within 2 weeks. We monitor how many appointments are made and attended along with customer satisfaction with the works carried out. Our contact centre send out a text message to customers confirming their appointment and a text following a repair asking for their feedback. If residents are dissatisfied with the repair our Clarion Response team will call the customer back in order to discuss and put things right.

**Point 2:** I would like Clarion to agree to give full details with timely notice to tenants and residents of any works to the communal areas or exterior of their buildings and of any requirements for access. This communication should include the name and contact details for a relevant Clarion officer.

In the situation of planned works we would provide the appointment details along with a work description and the name of the contractor, contacting relevant residents if access to their home was required. For day to day and emergency repairs this level of communication is not possible. We have a duty to ensure the health and safety of our residents, any communal repairs reported by residents would be attended promptly. For example if a faulty lift or door was reported we would not delay the repair by contacting each resident. In the example of a lift outage, if the repair could not be completed on the same day, the team would contact all residents providing an explanation and an expected completion time and date.

**Point 3:** I would like Clarion to award the £5 compensation for all missed appointments by any of their representatives without reasonable notice.

We operate in the same way as our colleague registered providers and have very clear customer service processes and standards across all our operational areas of business. These meet the regulatory standards and requirements. We do not have an automated system. We offer compensation for missed appointments on our repair service. We can confirm that the award is £15 compensation for missed appointments where we have failed to keep an appointment without giving 24 hours' notice. All other non-repair visits are not subject to this and officers if they cannot make an appointment due in the main to unforeseen circumstances we would either send a different officer or contact the customer to re-arrange the appointment.

## **Complaints**

**Point 1:** I would like Clarion to implement a system which allows for continuity when dealing with repairs so that when problems occur tenants are not required to repeat the entire process or spend time cataloguing their experience.

Clearly there have been issues recently due to the cyber incident and our inability to access our core IT systems, including our repairs system. We can confirm that we have a customer relationship management system which in normal times captures all customer contact and Clarion action. We accept that we will not always get it right and that some matters are more complex than others. To address this we will ensure the customer is supported by a named Resident Liaison Officer who will work with residents on complex matters to conclusion.

In the absence of an address and specific issues we are unable to review what may have gone wrong for this particular customer.

**Point 2:** I would like to ask Clarion to freeze all service charges until the backlog of service charge queries and related complaints has been cleared.

Clarion adhere to the Service Charge legislation and have a clear complaints and service charge query process in place for residents. The service provision at schemes/blocks is contractual and we would not look to stop / freeze these services following an enquiry or complaint.

On concluding a service charge query or complaint, where a service charge refund is due, we will backdate any compensation value once our investigation has finished.

We do accept that this year has been particularly challenging with the IT systems outage which meant that all of our leaseholders, shared owners and tenants on variable service charges (c46, 000) received the legally required S.20 (b) notices.

Now that system issues have been largely resolved, we will look to include the statement of actual costs for 2021/22 within the rent review mailing timed for February 2023.

What this will mean for leaseholders and shared owner residents is that they will receive their rent and service charge demand for 2023/24 and notice of any surplus or deficit for 2021/22 applied to account.

With record levels of inflation the cost of providing many of our services has also substantially increased. Commensurate increases in service charges are likely.

### **Cyber incident**

**Question:** Can Clarion give 100% assurance to its tenants and residents that none of their personal data has been compromised?

We can confirm that Our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, where we keep the main bulk of our customer information, wasn't accessed. We are still investigating the extent to which data stored elsewhere may have been impacted. Our investigation is ongoing and we have been advised by our external experts in cyber security that it is important not to speculate further while the investigation is ongoing.

### **General issues not covered above**

We have read the narrative provided in the Anonymous Deputation. We cannot investigate or respond in-depth on the personal experience detailed without the resident's name and address. If we are supplied with this information we can then carry out a full review of the allegations made.

We have noted some detailed comments which relate back to 2018 and 2020 and the comments made are indeed of concern. What we can advise is that our systems and repair process have gone through a period of change with tighter monitoring of customer communication and oversight. We know we do get some things wrong at times and we encourage resident feedback including complaints and use this to identify process and service weakness. We use these findings to inform our service improvement plans.

All staff and contractors during the pandemic had clear guidance on wearing masks and operating in residents' homes. If there was a breach in process, if this was reported to us we would have addressed it at the time. We cannot comment on the matter relating to short or no notice visits, but can confirm that we were operating a repair service throughout the pandemic and this was based on an appointment basis.

We take our fire, health and safety seriously and carry out communal area inspections of all our buildings. Where we find a fire risk such as residents storing belongings in the communal hall we would serve a TORT Notice and the goods/items would be removed on its expiry. Without an address we are unable to provide any further information.

We have invested the sum of £1,080,632.50 in our planned maintenance programme in the borough with a further £2.6m planned over the next few years. We would urge the resident to contact us to enable us to plan any required investment/ disability adaptations.

We note the comments relating to the text input box on the Clarion website and can confirm that our Digital Team has identified that the number of characters that can be entered into the text box on our website is a key driver for excessive complaints forms and duplication which causes customer annoyance.

We are working on a brand new complaints form which allows further content and captures all of the information required.

We have a team of Neighbourhood Response Officers working in the borough, if a visit is required this can be arranged. To facilitate this I have detailed below the various ways to make contact with us.

Telephone: 0300 500 8000 (24/7)

Live Chat Service: This is accessible via the Clarion website during our opening hours (<https://www.myclarionhousing.com>)

All Clarion Housing liveried vehicles have trackers fitted, if we can be provided with the address and date we can investigate and discuss with the driver the allegation of engine idling.

**Section 2:** All Registered Providers to provide further information on their approaches to:

### **1.0 Assisting tenants with debt management in light of the cost of living crisis**

The economic outlook has seen inflation (CPI for September 2022) reaching 10.1% and this will have a serious impact on many of our residents.

Clarion Housing Group has a wide range of service provision that was in place prior to the current cost of living crisis to support any residents facing money, debt or energy challenges. This includes:

- Free access to debt advice for all residents through our partner StepChange. Residents who are identified as being in a more vulnerable situation can also access more intensive support through our debt advice partner Pennysmart
- Free access to our Clarion Futures Money Guidance service delivered by phone Monday – Friday in working hours. The team focuses on each household's needs including checking entitlements, completing a budget, identifying savings and better deals, energy advice as well as hardship support through supermarket and energy vouchers as well as white goods and beds. They also refer onto specialist support such as Jobs and Training, Debt Advice and Tenancy Sustainment
- Our Sustainment and Benefits service works longer term with any resident whose tenancy is at risk to deal with the challenges they face and help maintain their tenancy.
- We have a cost of living hub on our website which also summarises the support available as well as our new You Are Not Alone information leaflets to help residents through the crisis <https://www.myclarionhousing.com/help-and-guidance/money-guidance/cost-of-living>
- To reach households who may not be aware of these services we make outbound calls to those residents who may be more likely to be at risk of money or debt challenges to inform them of the support available. Since August 2022 we have made over 2650 calls and engaged over 700 residents in support.
- Using our 'Every Visit Counts' methodology to ensure that if colleagues are in a property fixing or meeting for a separate problem, they look for signs of hardship, vulnerability alongside property issues such as condensation, damp and mould and raise any issue.

### **2.0 Retrofitting their stock**

We have identified circa 50 homes in Camden as part of our 3 year retrofit programme. These are not scheduled for 2023/24 and therefore we anticipate the works taking place in the financial years 2024-2026.

### **3.0 Investing in fire safety measures**

Over the last 4 financial years, our Building Safety Team has spent over £108m on fire safety. This work includes fire risk assessment actions, door replacement programmes, external wall system works and active fire system installations and upgrades.

We are predicting to spend a further £40m in 2022/23, with another £125m budgeted for over the next 3 financial years.

Specifically in Camden;

- we have invested in linked fire alarms systems to 135 converted street properties
- upgraded automatic fire detection at Belmore House and Jubilee House sheltered housing schemes
- are planning to commence upgrade works to Dennis Handfield supported housing scheme

### **4.0 Addressing over-crowding**

All residents can access housing options guidance and advice on our website or request support via our customer services team as well as our tenancy sustainment team for more complex cases.

We're committed to improving our homes and communities, giving customers better places to live in safer, greener and more pleasant neighbourhoods. We decide where to regenerate based on the condition of homes, levels of overcrowding or under occupation, and the views of our residents.

We are looking at our pipeline, borough requirements and size of units. We know there has been a tendency from some local authorities to nominate households to us who would overcrowd units at the start of the tenancy, going forward we will only let to the units' permitted occupancy number.

We are currently researching financial incentives to offer to residents who are under occupying. It is hoped this will help release some larger family units to address overcrowding in our stock.

We are reviewing as part of our response to Damp and Mould how many of our units affected are overcrowded homes. We are looking at all households that have reported damp and mould in the last 2 years.

These homes will be revisited and where additional works are required these will be carried out. The visit may lead to financial support/hardship referrals and in some cases additional points for a management transfer to a bigger home.

## 5.0 Planned investment in 2022/23 in their Camden stock

The following provides a breakdown of investment completions for existing Camden stock during 2021/22 (including component replacements and cyclical works):

Cyclical Decoration (63 properties)	£330,274.80
Bathroom (41 properties)	£216,534.56
Electrical Upgrades (12 properties)	£20,415.55
Heating Upgrades (50 properties)	£226,813.93
Kitchens (32 properties)	£238,466.92
Windows (3 properties)	£48,126.74
Total	£1,080,632.50

We are currently working with our partners to specifically review the programme delivery challenges in Camden (including parking, supply chain issues to name a few). We have recently secured a Planned Investment operations hub at The Towers, 39 Dartmouth Park Avenue, NW5 1JP, this will assist in the mobilisation of our planned investment programme.

In 2022/23, our Planned Investment team will be investing a total of £2.6 million in cyclical works and component replacements across Camden. However, it is anticipated that a large proportion of these works will be carried forward to 2023/24 and will be subject to reprogramming and reprioritisation.

The majority of Camden properties are subject to planning approval (windows, roofs) with further restrictions within conservation areas or listed buildings. The average planning turnaround time is between 14-16 weeks, generally in these areas windows are required to be timber D/G, rather than UPVC and this product takes longer to be made.