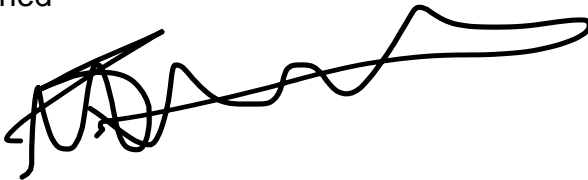


<b>LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN</b>	<b>WARD(S): ALL</b>
<b>REPORT TITLE:</b> Annual Report of the Cabinet Member for Better Homes	
<b>REPORT OF:</b> Cabinet Member for Better Homes	
<b>FOR SUBMISSION TO:</b> Housing Scrutiny Committee	<b>DATE:</b> 21 February 2023
<p><b>SUMMARY OF REPORT:</b></p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Better Homes here provides the Committee with their annual report for discussion. This year's report includes key timely updates from relevant teams in the portfolio who serve our residents and Camden communities, along with any other information useful to the Committee for the portfolio area.</p> <p><b>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to information:</b></p> <p>No documents that are required to be listed were used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p><b>Contact Officer:</b> Nathan Koskella Cabinet Officer The Cabinet Office Camden Council 5 Pancras Square London N1C 4AG Email: <a href="mailto:Nathan.Koskella@camden.gov.uk">Nathan.Koskella@camden.gov.uk</a></p>	
<p><b>RECOMMENDATIONS:</b></p> <p>The Housing Scrutiny Committee is asked to:</p> <p>(i) Note and comment on the report.</p>	
<p>Signed</p>  <p><b>Councillor Meric Apak</b> Cabinet Member for Better Homes</p> <p>9 February 2023</p>	

## Section 1: Introduction

- 1.1. This report covers approximately the calendar year of 2022 and into 2023, a time of many challenges. Chief among them are the cost-of-living crisis and energy crunch that are affecting our residents, businesses, voluntary organisations and the Council itself.
- 1.2. The Council is facing difficult decisions as we continue to prepare for the future while we strive to deliver the best possible service to our residents. Throughout my report, transformational change is central, because I strongly believe the HRA and Housing Service must adapt and must improve if it is to survive and provide the services expected by our residents. My priority is always to ensure that any “efficiencies” are from true improvements in ways of working, synergies that have been found or other optimisations, and not front-line service cuts.

## Section 2: Landlord Services and Tenant Support Update

- 2.1. As the Cost-of-Living crisis deepened in 2022, our neighbourhood housing officers and other staff have stepped up support to tenants. In October they took on a new role helping tenants who need it to access support from the Council’s Cost-of-Living Crisis fund.
- 2.2. In November our tenant visiting programme began and is now in full swing. Our aim is to visit as many tenants as possible during 2023 and into 2024 to offer advice, help and support when it is needed. We are prioritising visits to our most overcrowded households, and at the same time, we are reviewing how we work with tenants who live in homes that are bigger than they need.
- 2.3. Towards the end of 2022, we created a new post of **home energy advice officer** to support council tenants with advice and help with keeping well and warm and reducing energy costs. Our home energy advice officer started work on 16 January.
- 2.4. In December the Council also appointed an officer to lead our work to gain accreditation with DAHA, the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance. Working towards accreditation will build on the work we have done to improve the training, guidance and support our staff receive to help them support those who experience domestic violence and abuse.
- 2.5. In September we set up new specialist teams focussed on rent arrears and re-letting empty homes. Work with residents who have fallen behind with their rent, and prioritising getting empty homes ready to let, generates income for much needed council services as well as providing help to tenants who are struggling with money and new homes for those who need them. These will

remain our priorities alongside our work with residents at a local level to improve the neighbourhoods in which they live and the responsiveness and accessibility of the services they rely on.

### **Section 3: Estate Management Updates**

#### *Expanding the Caretaking Support and Response team*

- 3.1. One of the most notable innovations to come out of the 2018 Caretaking Review was the mobile Caretaking Support and Response team (CSR), tasked with supporting Caretakers by delivering enhanced cleaning and project work. This has continued to great effect in the last year.
- 3.2. Residents are keenly aware of the boost this team provides our estates and how it works closely with Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs) to identify and deliver work that is beyond the scope of Caretakers, but not enough of a priority for Capital works programmes. This team is a practical response to bridging that gap and delivers improvements for our residents quickly and in a cost-effective way.
- 3.3. The CSR have proven, time and again, to be a huge asset to the Caretaking Service and we are pleased to confirm that we are introducing a second team to increase our capacity and continue this success.

#### *Introduction of Traffic Management Orders on Estate Land*

- 3.4. The first estate Traffic Management Order (TMO) was introduced on the Maiden Lane Estate in 2020, addressing health and safety concerns on the estate, which had been suffering from high pressure parking demand and non-compliant parking. There was a high degree of unauthorised parking and several incidents where the Fire Brigade reported being unable to access all parts of the estate in the time they needed to get to an emergency. In addition, there were frequent bin collections missed as the council's contractor was prevented from accessing some parts of the estate due to obstructive parking.
- 3.5. **Two years on, the conclusion of the changes to Maiden Lane pilot has improved parking compliance on the estate**, with emergency vehicles and waste trucks able to access the estate quickly, footways kept clear and legitimate permit holders, including disabled residents able to access parking and use their bays safely.
- 3.6. Following the success of this work, and the proven benefits to residents, we are proposing to extend the TMO model across the borough. Late in 2022 we held a borough-wide consultation to get residents views on TMOs, and while

we are currently waiting for that report to be published, early indications are that residents are keen for this change to happen, to address the endemic issue of non-compliant and inconsiderate parking, and to bring improvements to our estates; such as greater alternative transport options, safer site layouts and better service-vehicle access.

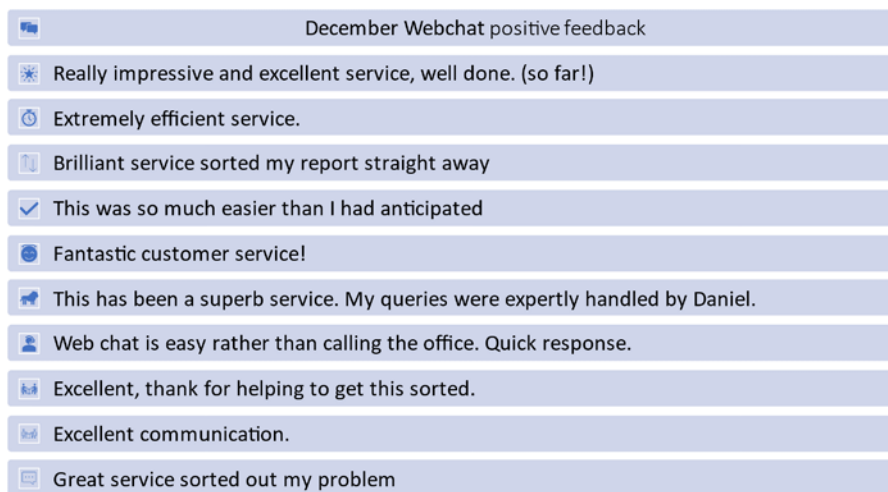
- 3.7. Introducing a TMO is complex, requiring a very prescriptive process to be followed to meet regulatory requirements. It means however that when properly implemented, parking on estates becomes subject to the same enforcement legislation as is undertaken on the borough's highways.
- 3.8. We want to move quickly and with the minimum of disruption to residents. However, it will not be feasible to introduce TMOs to all estates at the same time. This is due to the level of consultation required as well as the number of physical adjustments that are required to implement the new parking schemes, such as adjustments to site layout, marking bays appropriately, installing signage, and introducing alternative transport provisions.
- 3.9. At this time, we consider that not all estates in Camden will benefit from a TMO, however as we work through our list of priority sites it might become apparent that more estates should be included in the programme. We will continue to monitor parking on all our estates to ensure that all residents receive the best outcome from this programme.

#### *Prevention of Fuel Poverty*

- 3.10. Due to recent uncertainty in the energy market, we know how important it is for our residents to have access to their electrical meter readings in order to manage energy consumption effectively for finance and budgeting. For many residents this information can be difficult to obtain, as in some older buildings meters are often located in electrical intake cupboards, where access is restricted for safety reasons and is limited to qualified staff and utility company personnel only.
- 3.11. Our Meter Reading service accesses these restricted areas on request and support residents with meter readings and provides access for top-up meters. They will also work with residents and their utility providers to relocate prepayment energy meters inside homes, helping to address fuel poverty, and facilitating smart meter installations and meter resets and access for other electrical works. **We are monitoring service demand** to ensure we continue to support residents and help to prevent fuel poverty.

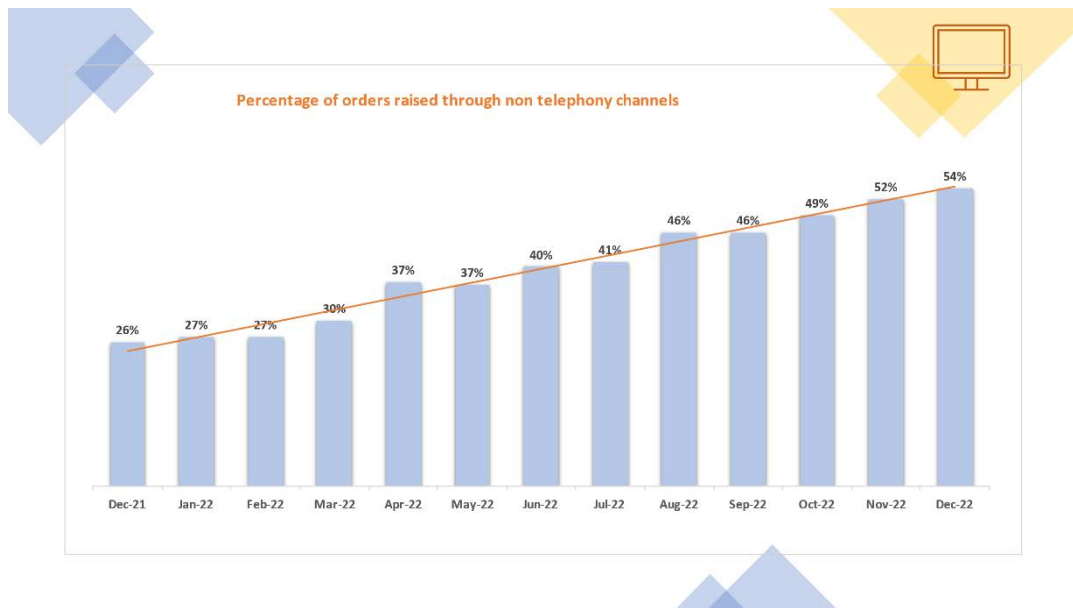
## Section 4: Property Engagement and Customer Services, including Repairs

- 4.1. The last year has been focused on doing things differently in the Housing repairs contact centre, mindful of customers' needs and demands and delivering on an ever-increasing demand in service in a more innovative way. Although the overall customer demand for our service remains exceptionally high, the **concerted channel shift to address customer needs has been a critical driver to providing higher customer satisfaction.**
- 4.2. During 2022, we upgraded our very popular webchat provision, introduced SMS in June and WhatsApp in December, and now offer a multi-lingual service to our residents. As a result, we regularly have conversations with residents where English is their second language.
- 4.3. Upon introduction, this new way of reporting repairs handled **22,000** instant web chat messages (up from 6,000 in 2021), in addition to **16,000** SMS and **252** WhatsApp messages, and customer feedback has been very encouraging:

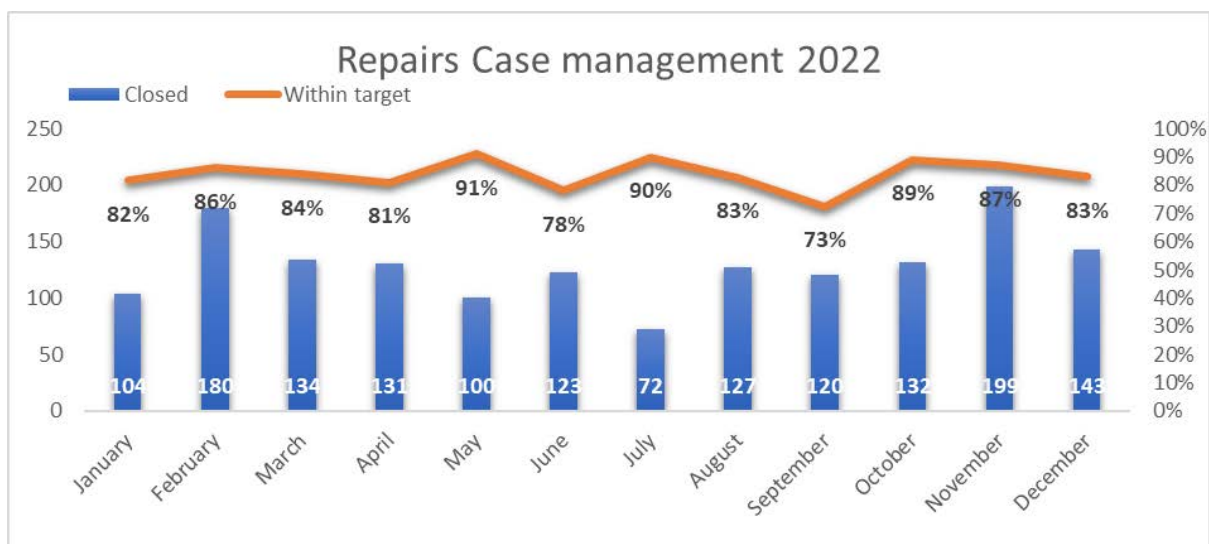


- 4.4. In early 2023, we plan to launch video calling. This will be initially to report Damp and Mould, but if successful, we will expand this across the contact centre.
- 4.5. As can be seen from the chart below, reporting of **all** new repairs other than by telephone continues to improve. By December, we had reached **54%**, up from 26% in the same period in 2021, and just 2% in 2020. As a result, we continued to see a dramatic decrease in calls in 2022. This fall has also meant we have achieved call answering and speed of answer targets for the

year's busiest period. In the end, the final tally of calls was **183,559**, which has fallen again from 2021, which was **287,548**.



- 4.6. We have continued to change, adapt, and try new things to improve the customer experience while achieving targets and maintaining the same staff, despite the ever-increasing challenges from post-Covid and increased customer contact. We are **honest with our residents and show our performance statistics on our website – good, bad, and improving**.
- 4.7. In 2022, we continued our programme to measure, learn and improve our service with our customer satisfaction programme for property services. This includes Repair's customers, Voids, Capital Works, and Case Management. Customer feedback on this programme is very encouraging, and we have engaged with over 8000 residents about their interaction with us. Overall, the feedback has been positive, and early intervention in dissatisfaction should lead to fewer formal complaints.
- 4.8. Through continued focus on individual and team performance, we continue to improve case management response times.
- 4.9. During December, there was a **heightened focus on damp and mould**, with case volumes received higher than usual. However, we still achieved 84% of cases answered within ten working days, which is a further improvement from the 75% recorded in 2021.
- 4.10. We also managed to answer complaints on behalf of Caretaking Services and CCTV with existing resources. As we move into 2023, we will expand this to include other parts of the Housing Directorates.



## Section 5: Rent, Finance Matters, and increased but unfunded burdens

- 5.1. The events of the past few years have created an almost perfect storm for Camden's Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The period from 2016-2020 saw enforced annual rent reductions of 1% as part of the government's efforts to reduce welfare expenditure, even though, this did not include the private rented sector. This resulted in a cumulative loss of rental income stream amounting to just under £70 million, and it meant that the HRA entered the current period of economic volatility with its finances in a weakened state. Brexit, Covid and the war in Ukraine have all contributed to inflation reaching a 40 year high with CPI at 11.1% in October, which has put unprecedented pressure on the costs of energy, repairs, maintenance, and housing services. This is alongside increased regulation for fire and building safety and increased legal compliance required of social landlords in the Social Housing Regulation Bill introduced to Parliament in the last year. Alongside this we are actively addressing instances of damp and mould that are constantly emerging. Furthermore, the HRA budget includes interest on the borrowing necessary to finance estate regeneration.
- 5.2. At the same time funding for the HRA has consistently failed to keep pace with these rising costs. With no central government support available, the Council will need to make some difficult decisions to secure the long-term viability of the HRA while meeting the ambitions of We Make Camden, the Council's vision for the borough.
- 5.3. The Council's options for raising additional funds are few, and include rents, service charges, and raising costs of leaseholder heating charges.

**The Committee will note the recent (January 2023) report** it received, “Housing Revenue Account Budget, Rent Review 2023/24 (CS/2023/01)” (“Rent Report”)—which lays out how the Council intends to continue to invest in its housing stock and services despite the increasingly challenging financial climate that the HRA is operating in. For details please see:

<http://democracy.camden.gov.uk/documents/s109565/10%20HRA%20Budget%20Rent%20Review%20report%20and%20appendices.pdf>

And the Rent Report’s addendum:

<http://democracy.camden.gov.uk/documents/s109791/Addendum%20to%20HRA%20report.pdf>.

### *Special Note on Lost Income Figure*

- 5.4. To supplement the Rent Report already received by this Committee, I wanted to explain one key figure, that of £69 million lost income.

This was a calculation based on work years ago: it compared how rent would be received during the following 4 years of **1%** rent reductions, versus how much rent would be received if the rents were permitted to increase by the existing rent policy, which would be more than: **CPI + 1%** (& £2 in 16/17 and 17/18, to invest in better homes). **It’s illustrative of what we could have received if the government had not intervened, which could have been invested in our stock**, rather than the cuts we had to make during that time instead. In this way, this income we have “lost” is a valid and a recognised figure but one measuring a loss of potential income due to government intervention.

### **Section 6: Resident Safety Update**

- 6.1. Since the Grenfell tragedy we have participated on the Government’s ‘*Early Adopters Panel*’ and put this learning into good use. No doubt there has been some difficult learning along the way. And over the last 12 months, the Council has continued to make positive progress on delivering the residents safety programme and on the implementation of fire and building safety legislation.
- 6.2. Our focus on listening to residents and working closely with them has seen the publication of the first annual report on our progress in delivering the Council’s Fire & Building Safety Charter commitments to resident safety. We want residents to hold us to account for our performance and we have sent a copy of the Charter report to all Council homes.



- 6.3. We have also adopted a communal areas policy and sent a leaflet to all 33,000 Council homes explaining how residents can use the communal parts of their building so that they and their neighbours can be safe in their homes.
- 6.4. We **have increased the number of resident places** on the resident-led Fire Safety & Compliance Advisory Panel to 12 and in the next year the Panel will be reviewing an update of the Tenancy Guide to ensure that it gives clear advice to tenants on their fire and building safety rights and responsibilities.
- 6.5. We are also undertaking a **visiting programme to all Council homes** to ensure that we are able to keep residents safe in their homes, address fire risks and make sure that we help and support residents to maintain their tenancies.
- 6.6. We have commissioned a programme of external wall surveys to make sure that our buildings meet fire safety standards and to identify and carry out improvement works if they are needed.
- 6.7. We are putting in place arrangements to carry out regular checks of communal fire doors and flat front doors, to make sure they are in full working order and that they will protect residents from the spread of smoke or fire.
- 6.8. We are in addition installing way-finding signage and emergency lighting to ensure that residents and fire fighters are able to find their way around and out of our buildings in the event of an emergency.
- 6.9. We are recruiting a dedicated team of Camden Building Safety Managers who will work with residents of our high-rise residential blocks to develop plans and take the decisions that will keep their buildings safe. The Building Safety Managers will develop the Building Safety Cases we must submit to the Building Safety Regulator from April 2024.
- 6.10. Finally, we are working with the London Fire Brigade to ensure we provide them with the information they need about the structure, lifts, layout and fire safety equipment in our residential buildings in order to respond in the event of an emergency. We are installing secure information boxes with this information in our buildings so that hard copy information is available to crews when they are on the ground, in addition to any digital information available to them.

## **Section 7: Damp and Mould**

- 7.1. This is a further update to the Committee to the one I provided recently, on our ongoing work on the issue of damp and mould across the borough. This

includes both work before and after the recent inquest into the death of Awaab Ishak and the Ombudsman report “Spotlight on Damp and Mould (October 2021)”, alongside some further proactive steps we are taking forward.

- 7.2. In January 2021, Camden responded to increased casework trends during the pandemic with resources allocated to mould washes as mitigation until the root cause could be identified, together with a proactive approach taken to casework.
- 7.3. In June 2021 additional resources were assigned, forming a ‘Damp and Mould Team’ who assessed referrals and where required commissioned a damp and mould survey within 10 working days. The survey reports contain recommendations which include working collaboratively with residents to identify other factors that may help prevent mould growth in their homes.
- 7.4. From the team’s inception through to December 2022, this new referral route had handled **more than 1,800 cases and there had been targeted expenditure of c. £2.4m to tackle damp and mould**. The most common root causes identified by the team were leaks from above, inadequate ventilation and roofing repairs in addition to other compounding factors such as overcrowding.
- 7.5. The Council also started work to restructure its repair team so that the damp and mould team would become better integrated. The organisational change process has concluded, and we are moving to the recruitment phase to secure permanent resources. In the immediate term we have assembled an interim team comprising Repairs Supervisors, Mould Marshals and administrative support.
- 7.6. Following the Coroner’s Report into the tragic death of Awaab Ishak, our processes have been further reviewed. Prior to December 2022, a third-party surveyor had assessed all referrals however this was not sustainable as demand increased. We therefore put in place arrangements for officers to visit most cases in the first instance with surveyor reports commissioned where further diagnostic work is needed.
- 7.7. In accordance with Public Health guidance, we assess whether anyone in the household is a child of 5 years and under with a severe respiratory (breathing) condition, or over 65yrs with a severe respiratory condition. Public Health has advised that those at a particularly increased health risk are children under the age of 1 year, premature and new-born babies and those over 85 years.

- 7.8. When officers visit, they produce a checklist and a confirmation of the next steps to be taken, we aim to do this within 10 working days. In some cases, an urgent mould wash or other measures may be needed to mitigate until the root cause can be identified or works completed, e.g. providing a de-humidifier.
- 7.9. If extensive works are required and the risk factors are high then the tenant may have to move either temporarily or permanently. An updated procedure note has been drafted so everyone is aware of the process. The resident will be advised on next steps and timescales, together with the complaints procedure and contact details.
- 7.10. A **cross-Council project board has been set up with the mission that no one is at risk of harm in Camden from damp and mould**. The project team is identifying actions, some of which have already been implemented, taking into account the 26 recommendations of the Housing Ombudsman Report [Spotlight on Damp and Mould](#) published in October 2021. As well as the lessons learned from the recent Coroner's report the project team will:
- create a Council damp and mould policy;
  - review and update procedures (including Essential Repairs), systems and risk management;
  - review data and performance on damp and mould and create new performance measures presented in a dashboard;
  - improve education and awareness of risks to health, how to prevent it and what to do if you have it – including a YouTube clip for information and guidance;
  - and improve the way agencies work together, referral pathways and information sharing.
- 7.11. Wider actions we are taking also include:
- An education, training and awareness plan for officers across the Council, our multi-agency partners e.g. health visitors, midwives, GPs, hospitals, and residents.
  - A damp and mould meeting is scheduled with housing associations operating in Camden on 21 February, this to share knowledge and make connections across teams and agencies. Camden has requested housing associations in borough to provide Repairs contact details so that these can be published on our website together with contacts for our Private Rented Sector Team. These will be disseminated to our multi-agency partners providing a pathway for referrals across all tenures.

7.12. The Council is also taking more proactive approaches to our communications and our data gathering to combat this issue.

7.13. As a social housing landlord, along with all landlords, we needed to do more to reach out to our tenants to make sure all incidents of damp and mould are being reported to us. We have written to council tenants including sheltered housing and residents in Camden managed temporary accommodation, using a variety of channels to remind them of how to report damp and mould to the Repairs Service. The latest communications activity is summarised here:

- A letter from me as Cabinet lead and leaflet on how to report damp and reduce moisture was delivered to 22,307 council households in mid-December 2022. We also wrote to those in temporary accommodation with the same messaging. In advance of the letters being delivered 17,500 text messages were sent to registered tenants and an email version was sent to 13,595 via GovDelivery to encourage tenants to report and share photos online or via text to reduce pressure on the call centre once letters were received.
- A dedicated damp and mould repairs telephone line was launched on 1 December.
- The damp and mould section on the Camden Housing repairs webpage has been updated and the leaflet is available ([www.camden.gov.uk/damp-and-mould](http://www.camden.gov.uk/damp-and-mould)) and a damp and mould message has been added to the top of the repairs webpage ([www.camden.gov.uk/housing-repairs](http://www.camden.gov.uk/housing-repairs)) which links directly through to the reporting form. The Repairs service has updated the reporting form at [www.camden.gov.uk/report-damp](http://www.camden.gov.uk/report-damp)
- The Private Rented Sector Team has updated its web page with information on damp and mould for private renters [Damp and mould - Private Renters in Camden - Camden Council](#)
- Additional contact is being made by calling more than 8,361 increased risk households to check for problems with damp and mould. We started by prioritising the 624 people who have increased health risks including: overcrowded families with children aged 5 years and under; residents who are registered for enhanced repairs aged 65 years+ and/or receive a care package, have a disability or with children aged 5 years and under; and check in with council tenants in need of essential repairs awaiting a move due to damp and mould. Of the 1,089 calls already made, 552 (51%) have reported damp and mould. Of the 172 overcrowded families with children contacted, 50% have reported damp and mould. Calls are anticipated to be completed by the end of March 2023.

7.14. **As expected, the above activity has generated many more referrals.** Officers across the Repairs Service, caretakers, sheltered housing wardens, Tenant Participation Team and some Neighbourhood Housing Officers

deferred their holiday leave, and within 4 weeks (from 9 December 2022 to 9 January 2023), 1,353 inspections were completed.

- 7.15. Since 9 December, when our additional proactive work commenced, we have received 5,072 new referrals from residents. The total number of cases when combined with cases prior to our communications is 7,738. These figures include the 796 inspections completed by the sheltered housing wardens for the sheltered housing service (98%) with no access to 10 homes largely due to stays in hospital or residential care homes. Of these there were 94 reports of damp and mould (12%).
- 7.16. Throughout December 2022 and January 2023 we have been focussed on ensuring we visit all referrals within 10 working days. Most cases inspected are relatively moderate or low risk. There have been 61 cases where an emergency visit within 24 hours has been assessed as necessary with all completed within timescale. At present we have 25 cases where residents have to move out of their homes to allow Camden to carry out essential repairs. Residents are offered a temporary or permanent move depending on duration of works.
- 7.17. Our next priority is to schedule all of the actions from the visits carried out and keep residents informed so we can provide reassurance, take appropriate action and manage expectations. We are currently reviewing our systems and processes to improve delivery in the context of high case volume and recruiting and training new staff.
- 7.18. In terms of gathering additional data and the ongoing monitoring of the position across our housing stock we are:
- Capturing data as part of our 2023 borough wide stock condition survey which includes an external check of all homes and a detailed internal check of 10% of our tenanted homes;
  - Starting our proactive tenancy visits by Neighbourhood Housing Officers, with training provided to help identify households at risk;
  - Closely monitoring and co-ordinating casework across different channels, for example disrepair cases, ombudsman cases and the Council's complaints process;
  - And building closer links with public health and other services interacting with residents so that we capture concerns and act on them.

## **Section 8: Chalcots Estate Project Update**

- 8.1. As the Committee may be aware, the Chalcots estate has 5 high-rise tower blocks with 717 homes to residents, including about 130 Leaseholders - Blashford (73 flats), Bray (160 flats), Burnham (160 flats), Dorney (160 flats)

and Taplow (160 flats).

- 8.2. The scope of the major works is to renew the building envelope of all five buildings whilst residents remain in situ, including roof replacement installation of a building maintenance unit, new cladding, window replacement, brick work replacement to lower floors and insulation to the basements/undercrofts.
- 8.3. The purpose of the major works is to bring the estate to the highest standard of safety, improve the wellbeing of residents and futureproof the buildings as much as we can within current resource constraints – helping to create an attractive, sustainable and vibrant neighbourhood for everyone who lives there now and in the future.
- 8.4. The structure of Blashford is different and we split the project into 2 contracts: Design and build for Blashford and Build only for the four similar towers. The procurement strategy approved in November 2020 to split the project into two contracts and their respective contractor procurement was a success in that we created a competing market and appointed in 2021 the best contractors in terms of quality at a cost that is about £25M less than the cost proposal of the previous contractor.
- 8.5. The planned site set up and construction timelines are in the table below, with works carried out first at Bray and Taplow and once completed, followed by Burnham and Dorney. Blashford is done in parallel separately and is much more intrusive in terms of disruption to residents.

8.6. Timeline of Work:

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Blashford</b>	<b>Bray &amp; Taplow</b>	<b>Burnham &amp; Dorney</b>
Contractors submit their contract offer	February 2023	November 2022	November 2022
The contract is agreed and signed	February 2023	February 2022	February 2022
Preparing to set up the construction site, including hoarding (mesh fencing), etc.	March 2023	March 2022	March 2023
Construction works start (roof replacement, installation of cladding, windows, etc.)	March 2023	October 2022	August 2023
Anticipated completion, including site demobilisation	March 2024	November 2023	September 2024

8.7. There are a number of ways we engage with residents throughout the project, including:

- Show flats have been a great success to engage with residents about the major works;
- Videos have been prepared to describe how we intend to carry out the works;
- As part of the home visits, which take place 6 to 8 weeks before the works start, we talk through with residents their needs during the works, such as storage or access to a home away from home flat and we confirm the selected choices in terms of radiators, blinds and curtains and type of window opening mechanism for the tilt only windows in kitchen and side lounge window;
- Residents are eligible for the enhanced disturbance payment if they give access consent within 10 working days of receiving the letter after their show flat viewing for the works to take place in their home;
- The resident handbook about the major works at Bray, Burnham, Dorney and Taplow towers was issued in late November 2022 and the handbook for Blashford residents will be issued in spring 2023;
- Based on the success of the resident procurement panel, we are setting up a contractor performance and monitoring panel for each project;
- And we continue to arrange monthly meetings with TRA chairs, virtual monthly meetings open to all residents, drop-in sessions, open days and monthly newsletters.

## **Section 9: Tenant Participation Work & “Tenant’s Voice” Update**

- 9.1. At the September 2022 Housing Scrutiny Committee meeting, it was discussed how the Council supports residents to come together to enhance our communities and to engage with us to improve housing services.
- 9.2. We believe that the current engagement framework is robust and the good dialogue and relationships we have with our residents has enabled us to react effectively together to support communities during challenging times, such as the Chalcots evacuation and Covid-19 pandemic.
- 9.3. Significant work has been undertaken to make services more accessible and responsive. We know that 70% of tenant contacts are to the repairs service and that this area of activity is the key driver of tenant satisfaction. The restructure of the Repairs team and the creation of a new property Customer Services and Engagement team has brought about significant improvement in tenant satisfaction in those areas and we expect the changes we are now

making in the Housing Management division in bringing services together will deliver further improvements.

9.4. **Tenant participation will sit within the new Innovation and Improvement service going forward**, helping to build on our existing framework whilst modernising and progressing our approach. It will support the delivery of the following outcomes:

- Developing a resident-centred culture;
- Achieving our estate mission that ‘by 2030, Camden’s estates and their neighbourhoods are healthy, sustainable and unlock creativity’;
- Fully complying with the regulator’s Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard;
- Attaining the top quartile in London for Respectful and Helpful Engagement Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

9.5. While broader changes to our approach are being implemented, the **Council is taking forward the timely and helpful recommendations made in the Cabinet Advisor’s 2021 report on the Tenant’s Voice**, prioritised around the themes of *Information about Your Home and Your Community*, *Different Ways to Get Involved*, and *Shaping Longer Term Change*. The Committee will recall that a full update on each of the fifteen actions was given in September, but since then notable progress has been made in the following areas:

- We have been giving a wider platform for tenant and leaseholder stories of success and ensuring that tenants and leaseholders have ways of sharing best practice. On a scheduled basis we are asking TRAs to tell us what they have been doing and sharing as good news stories on a range of platforms. One such example is the Winter Housing News story about the Holly Lodge TRA warm places initiative.
- “Start where you live,” a transformative community building programme was launched in the TRA hall in the Bourne estate TRA hall in November. This two, three and four-day programme, which continues through the first quarter of 2023, encourages our tenants and leaseholders to see their unlimited potential and harnesses imaginative and creative ideas, leading to powerful change within individuals and neighbourhoods.
- During October we mapped the community-based events and activities in our TRA halls to establish what is happening across the board. This has enabled us to establish where there is best practice as well as where there are gaps in provision. Where there is capacity, we are working with TRAs to support them to obtain partners and funding, including as part of the Council’s Warm Welcome initiative. Holly Lodge TRA and Bourne Estate



TRA are examples of groups who have actively been supported to participate in the 'Warm Welcome' initiative.

- To move forward our online offer we have progressed plans for a digital platform for involved residents or those interested in becoming involved in our Tenant and Resident Associations. We will offer a TRA hub where all information for TRAs in Camden can be accessed and will include TRA relevant policies and procedures, training opportunities for community representatives, registration documents, a TRA handbook and guidance for running TRA halls.

9.6. **Our current resident participation framework was developed in partnership with our tenants and leaseholders**, but now is the appropriate time to work with them again to review and broaden our approach. We are now entering an era of more proactive social housing regulation and amongst the areas of our work as a landlord, we will be judged on our relationship with our tenants. This will measure how respectful and helpful our engagement is, looking at how well we keep our tenants informed, how well we listen and treat them with respect. We therefore want to build on what works well now at Camden by exploring how residents might be more involved in shaping decisions rather than just being invited to a set agenda and moving from consulting to co-creating.

9.7. In reviewing resident participation, we want to ensure that the right strategic foundations are in place that informs the approach to engagement and firmly sets out clear aims and objectives and the importance of involving tenants. The changes we are making will ensure that all staff understand the role of resident engagement, the role they play in making it work for them and their service area and the benefits it can bring.

## **Section 10: Update on Inclusive Access to Support**

10.1. Across the organisation, we recognise that our support must be accessible to all our residents and are working to better enable disabled or other vulnerable residents to engage with the Council.

10.2. We for example recognise that how a resident initially engages with the housing repairs centre must be inclusive and accessible for all. For the past two years, we have rolled out many new contact-channel options, primarily tailored for deaf residents and for those where English may not be a resident's first language. Furthermore, not everyone is comfortable or able to have a telephone conversation, so we now provide multi-lingual Live-chat, WhatsApp and SMS reporting options, which are already proving to be a massive

success with very high customer satisfaction levels being recorded.

- 10.3. During Q4, the team aims to have in place a new video calling platform that would enable deaf and other more vulnerable residents the opportunity to have a 'virtual face-to-face' conversation with one of the team with the ability to bring translators onto the call as well.
- 10.4. We are also keen to make sure that all our tenants have the opportunity to talk to their neighbourhood housing officer, and that's why visiting tenants at home and seeing them face to face remains at the heart of our service.
- 10.5. We rely on residents to let us know about the issues in their neighbourhoods that need tackling. When their housing officer is a familiar face, tenants are more likely to contact us if they need help, or to let us know if they are worried about a neighbour.
- 10.6. As Camden faces significantly higher rates of mental ill health than the national average, we have a team of mental health professionals working alongside our neighbourhood housing teams. The team support our housing officers to work with tenants who struggle with mental health issues, improving the services they receive and strengthening links between housing teams and specialist mental health services
- 10.7. Finally, as part of our visiting programme we are asking tenants to let us know if they would need help if they needed to evacuate their home in an emergency. Improving our records on this will help services to respond more quickly to keep people safe. At the same time, asking tenants to let us know if they struggle with their mobility provides an opportunity to also establish if they need support with aides or adaptations in their home or advice about disability benefits.
- 10.8. All housing services will continue to explore more ways in which the provision we offer focuses on addressing all our residents' needs, including by working closely with colleagues across the Council, such as Contact Camden, to share these experiences and best practices.

## **Section 11: Update on Improving the Private Rented Sector in Camden**

- 11.1. Whilst the majority of private sector landlords in Camden provide good accommodation, there remains a number of criminal landlords determined to exploit vulnerable tenants. Camden continues to be at the forefront of utilising all powers available to tackle criminal landlords and poor properties.

- 11.2. Over the last year, 48 civil penalty notices have been issued against landlords for a range of breaches, with fines totalling £264,000. Collected fines are being reinvested into the service to increase the number of officers working towards improving standards.
- 11.3. The borough-wide houses in multiple occupation (HMO) licensing schemes continue to bring this important type of accommodation up to a minimum standard. The current schemes have more than 3,400 properties licensed, with many now being renewed. Whilst the majority of landlords have improved their properties to meet the Councils standards and licence conditions, there remain a number that have failed to take action. As a result, more than 150 licence renewals have been issued for only a one-year period to reflect the failure to comply with their licence conditions.
- 11.4. Following a successful recruitment campaign, the HMO enforcement team is now undertaking regular compliance inspections of licensed HMOs to ensure that standards are maintained throughout the typical 5 year licence period.
- 11.5. The Camden Private Renters website continues to be accessed by private renters, with more than 400 site visits per month. Since being launched there have been more than 7,000 page views with popular pages being those on affordable schemes, information about noise disturbances, our 'Who is my landlord?' page and help for families and children. Dedicated pages concerning damp and mould have been added to assist tenants understand what they should do if they experience it in their property.
- 11.6. The service has successfully sponsored its first officer to complete the new Private Rented Sector Qualification, developed jointly by Middlesex University and the GLA. The one-year course focuses on the key skills and knowledge needed to support the work of the Private Sector Housing Service moving forward. The service is keen to develop new talent, against a backdrop of a national shortage of EHOs, by recently recruiting 4 graduate EHOs who will be coached and supported to achieve full environmental health officer practitioner status.
- 11.7. Finally, the grants team has had a very busy year with more than £1m in Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) being approved for Camden residents directly (not to the Council), enabling them to remain independent in their home.

## **Section 12: My Areas of Focus for the Coming Year**

- 12.1. In the recent Joint Meeting of District Management Committees (DMCs), a key theme that I heard was a perception of poor and disjointed communication from the Council, both internally and externally. A second key message I took away was a perception of wastefulness, and inefficiencies in how we do things.
- 12.2. It is clear to me that there is a lot more we can do to improve these two areas in how we work. However, I also know there has been a lot done to improve things, and we must recognise and acknowledge this work as well. But to do that we must be better communicators.
- 12.3. For instance, if residents are unaware of why the repairs service has been slower to react, or why scaffolding remains up for months and years, then, they will make up their own reasons for this.
- 12.4. Residents need to know that our repairs service has had to catch up with more than half a million backlog of enquiries due to the shutdown in the pandemic without extra resources. They need to know that, this has also meant the way we live has increased damp and mould, and as we are now proactively seeking out damp and mould cases, our workload in this area has shot up more than tenfold. They also need to know that capital spending has had to be diverted away from routine Better Homes works so that we could comply with the extra regulatory safety requirements in fire safety works. And they need to know that, when there is masonry falling off our buildings, we need to put up scaffolding to protect those below while we scope and cost remedial works, set out to identify increasingly depleted funding sources to do the necessary works, consult leaseholders and tenants, and then go out to tender and appoint a contractor. We live in a climate in which a government can still raid HRA funds through the front door by placing unfunded legislative burdens and rent caps to reduce welfare budgets in its own Treasury coffers. All this adds to delay, and that means scaffolding will unfortunately have to remain in place for far longer than we would like it to. But we need to explain this and while I strongly believe officers are leaving no stone unturned, we also need to be open to suggestions on how we might be able to improve this.
- 12.5. Having said this, I agree that these two areas are giving rise to increased dissatisfaction to residents and will be my focus for the next 12 months.

## **Section 13: Conclusion**

- 13.1. As well as focusing on effective communication with our residents, responding to their emails within acceptable protocols and throughout the ranks, I do

firmly believe that our transformation agenda will lead to working in more efficient and effective ways maximising available resources and extracting the most out of every pound we spend.

- 13.2. Our two directors, Glendine Shepherd and Gavin Haynes, are leading on this and I thank them for their hard work in this past year. However, helping me drive this change have also been tenant representatives on our DMCs, fellow councillors, and our frontline officers, some of whom have recently agreed to defer their holidays to help colleagues address the increased demands in our damp and mould cases. I would like to particularly thank them for their thoughtfulness.
- 13.3. Finally, I pay tribute to our DMC representatives who tried to grapple with the difficulties of maintaining a healthy HRA and the need to maintain our homes at a decent standard. Increasing rents, service charges and energy prices to keep up with inflation and rising costs at a time of cost-of-living crisis is a painful exercise, and this pain was etched in the faces of our DMC reps when they contemplated the available options. Ultimately, those decisions were tight with a number of abstentions, but there was a very slim majority supporting the recommended increases. There were heavy caveats attached on more efficiency and limiting waste, hence my focus area I mention above.
- 13.4. I would extend my final thanks to members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee, particularly to the Chair – Cllr Samata Khatoon, for allowing me to present regular updates and for working with me constructively in order to improve the wellbeing of our residents in our council homes and beyond.

## **Section 14: Required Notations**

### **14.1. Finance Comments**

The Director of Finance has been consulted on the content of this report and has no comment to make at this time.

### **14.2. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor**

The Borough Solicitor has been consulted on the content of this report and has no comments to add.

### **14.3. Environmental Implications**

This report to the Committee should contain no additional environmental implications for Camden. Our policies and strategies which animate the work described in this report are always mindful of aligning with the Camden Climate Action Plan, Biodiversity Action Plan and Clean Air Action Plan.