

<b>LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN</b>	<b>WARDS:</b> All
<b>REPORT TITLE:</b> Housing Performance Update	
<b>REPORT OF:</b> Director of Housing	
<b>FOR SUBMISSION TO:</b> Housing Scrutiny Committee	<b>DATE:</b> 14 November 2023
<p><b>SUMMARY OF REPORT:</b> This report provides an update on performance for various aspects of the Housing service.</p> <p><b>LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 – ACCESS TO INFORMATION:</b> No documents that require listing were used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p><b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b> Ododo Dafé Head of Innovation and Improvement <a href="mailto:ododo.dafe@camden.gov.uk">ododo.dafe@camden.gov.uk</a></p>	
<p><b>RECOMMENDATIONS:</b></p> <p>The Housing Scrutiny Committee is asked to comment on the report, provide feedback on its format, and advise on any specific areas it would like to see in the future.</p>	

Signature: 

Glendine Shepherd

Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Context

- 1.1 We Make Camden outlines the Council's ambition that everyone in Camden will have a place they can call home. The Housing service contributes to this ambition through the Council's role as a strategic housing authority – delivering services such as homeless prevention and advice, hostels and temporary accommodation, allocations and rehousing, services supporting people in the private rented sector, and partnership working with housing associations. The Housing service also contributes through the Council's role as a social housing landlord managing services to tenants and leaseholders of around 33,000 homes.
- 1.2 Council housing across the country, and especially in urban areas, is under immense pressure with national policy changes and decades of budget cuts impacting councils' resources. This long-term housing challenge has been exacerbated over recent years by the energy crisis, building and fire safety requirements, and challenges around damp and mould which have impacted the Council's financial reserves, as well as inflation which has increased pressures on the Housing Revenue Account.
- 1.3 The Council is responding to two new important regulatory frameworks that will change the way that councils deliver and report on services. The Building Safety Act 2022 requires a team of Building Safety Managers for tall buildings and new regimes for checking thousands of doors as part of wider cyclical checks, and new different IT systems and practices to accurately record and report on safety actions. To meet this requirement and bring homes up to a good standard of repair an investment of £180m is needed.
- 1.4 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 places new requirements on all social landlords in respect of the quality and safety of homes, and the quality of neighbourhoods and housing services – including complaints, anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, tenant engagement and the provision of performance and other information to tenants.
- 1.5 As part of Camden's work to listen to and empower tenant voices both through tenancy visits and the intensive tenant participation programme, council staff have visited 4,750 homes and held multi-council team pop-up events on 15 council estates to discuss estate and service improvement with tenants. The Council is also working with Housemark who are currently conducting Camden's first tenant satisfaction survey as part of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures under the new regulatory regime. This survey will be completed by end March 2024.
- 1.6 Significant focus has recently been placed on establishing robust performance reporting arrangements and agreeing measures and targets to track. Housing services are focussing on improving performance in key areas of work. Temporary teams were established to give detailed attention to rent arrears management, the voids process and tenancy management, and the groundwork done in these teams provide the bedrock for upcoming structural and service improvements. There have also been major service reviews underway for homelessness and allocations areas of work.
- 1.7 As a result of the significant challenges ahead, the housing transformation aims to achieve the following outcomes:
  - Residents experience an empathetic, joined-up housing service and access the support they need quickly and effectively
  - Residents have access to decent, safe, warm and friendly housing and advice

- Camden’s estates and neighbourhoods have a greater sense of community cohesion and belonging
- Residents and staff are more connected, feel listened to and empowered; and their feedback is used to drive improvement

## 2. HOUSING SERVICES PERFORMANCE

### 2.1 Homelessness

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023 - YTD
Homeless approaches	2338	2322	2457	1734

- 2.1.1 Dwindling numbers of affordable private sector rented (PRS) accommodation, a tenuous renting landscape and consequent evictions has resulted in consistently high levels of homeless approaches in the last four years. The average PRS asking rent in London is 20% higher than pre-covid. In response, the Council is making use of targeted funding from central government to address the increasingly complex needs of rough sleepers and to support Camden’s Housing First approach. The Council will be developing short-term off-the-street accommodation, and an out of borough private rented accommodation offer for those who are not in priority need. The Council is also working to increase street outreach support and working with partners to target transport hubs and rough sleeping hotspots.
- 2.1.2 With the Home Office fast-tracking decisions to grant asylum seekers indefinite leave to remain, this group are increasingly approaching local authorities to apply as homeless. Homelessness approaches for those leaving Home Office accommodation increased by 270% since last year and from January to August 2023 alone and the number of people rough sleeping after receiving an asylum decision is three times as much as last year. The Council is developing short-term off-the-street accommodation, and an out of borough private rented accommodation offer for those with local connections. Work is also planned to target street outreach support and work with partners to target transport hubs and rough sleeping hotspots and have gained access to the Home Office portal so the Council can support those receiving asylum decisions sooner. Responding to this changing landscape, the Council have used central government funding for new homes for Afghan refugees and to support Ukrainian refugees into the PRS.
- 2.1.3 The Council acknowledges that homelessness is gendered, with women more likely to experience hidden forms and remain unsupported for longer than male counterparts. During September this year, Camden participated in the Women’s Rough Sleeping Census, a pan-London survey aiming to improve data on women’s homelessness and rough sleeping by advocating for targeted approaches to meet women’s needs. There were 44 responses in Camden (second highest in London) and significantly more women were reached and supported during gender-informed outreach.

2.1.4 A Homelessness Scrutiny panel has been set up to look at gaps in provision and make recommendations to improve the homelessness service. The panel will examine resident understanding and perceptions of homelessness and the experiences of accessing joined-up, holistic support for those who have been or are currently homeless.

## 2.2 Temporary Accommodation

	Q2 2022-23	Q3 2022-23	Q4 2022-23	Q1 2023-24	Q2 2023-24	% change Q2 2022 to Q2 2023
Number of households in TA	536	558	647	624	674	+25.7%

2.2.1 Temporary accommodation (TA) has been a particularly challenging area over recent years, with the numbers of residents occupying TA steadily rising. Despite Camden having the second lowest rate of residents in TA in London, the proportion of families in unsuitable TA (hotels and B&Bs) has been increasing over the last year.

2.2.2 Driven by the lack of PRS properties available for temporary accommodation, Camden is increasingly reliant on commercial hotels and B&Bs. A Temporary Accommodation Reduction Leads Group has been set up to address these issues, work together to seek alternative options, and to improve processes. This group will enable the Council to increase provision and move-on out of TA to meet the demand seen through the homeless front door.

2.2.3 The Council is also increasing the supply of self-contained accommodation to work towards getting all families out of hotels and B&Bs. Chester and Camden Road hostels are due to open in July 2025, providing an extra 86 family units for temporary accommodation use. Following on from the success in securing 133 properties through Temporary Accommodation Purchase Programme (TAPP) 1 and 2, the Council have also secured funding from DLUHC for a third phase, TAPP3, which will deliver an extra 50 units of TA by the end of next year.

## 2.3 Private Housing Sector

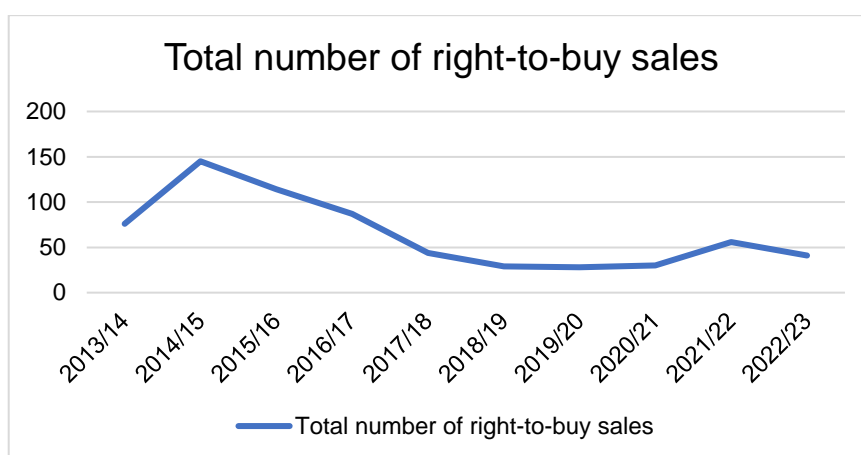
2.3.1 Housing services are working hard to improve standards in the private housing sector, ensuring Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) are licensed. There are approximately 3,575 active HMO licences across the borough and the Private Sector Housing Team are on track to meet the Council's annual target to license 600 HMO properties, at the end of Q2 480 HMO properties were licensed. Whilst working in partnership with landlords is the preferred method, the Council will act where landlords are non-compliant with the service issuing Civil Penalty Notices to the value of £590,000 in the first half of this year.

2.3.2 The service is about to start a project to find unlicensed Section 257 HMOs as it estimates there to be approximately 1,000 such premises in Camden. Work is being planned to renew the current discretionary additional HMO scheme which is due to end December 2025.

## 2.4 Right to Buy

2.4.1 Right to Buy sales have reverted back to relatively low levels of sales completed prior to the increased discount introduced in 2012, with 46% less sales made in 2022/23 compared with 2013/4. The Council has secured additional funding from DLUHC to buy back properties sold under right-to-buy as part of Camden’s Temporary Accommodation Purchasing Programme (TAPP3).

2.4.2 Under TAPP1 and TAPP2 the Council bought back 133 properties, and once TAPP3 is completed this total is likely to be 183 new homes.



2.4.3 Despite low sales figures, applications for right to buy homes has remained high over the last few years, with applications slowing during the year to date so far.

Year	RTB 1 Apps Received	RTB Completions
21-22	226	56
22-23	204	40
23-to date	80	17

## 2.5 Management of empty council homes (voids)

2.5.1 The Housing directorate has made reducing void properties a priority, leading to the establishment of the Moving Homes Team. Consequently, void property management has shown improvement, with the number of average void turnaround days decreasing from 228 days in Q3 22/23 to 180 days in Q2 23/24. While there was a slight increase from 160 days in August to 202 days in September, this was primarily due to the ongoing work to return some of the Council’s longest-standing vacant homes back into use. As properties with longer

void periods are brought back into use, the average number of void days may intermittently rise.

2.5.2 The Repairs improvement plan has identified 15 streams of work which includes a workstream on improvement to void performance. This work has begun with stakeholders across the various services with the overall aim to reduce the number of days properties remain void.

	Q3 2022-23	Q4 2022-23	Q1 2023-24	Q2 2023-24	Change Q3 2022 to Q2 2023
Average re-let times for empty	228	232	206	180	21% reduction in days void

## 2.6 Rent arrears

	Q4 2022-23	Q1 2023-24	Q2 2023-24
Rent arrears	£15,293,089	£17,104,480	£17,935,141
Collection rate	97.37%	94.72%	95.95%
% of tenants in 7 weeks+ arrears	15.22%	15.44%	16.12%
Number of tenants on UC	6,076	6,399	6,594
Total arrears by tenants on UC	£ 7,140,272	£8,930,423	£9,523,126
% of tenants on UC direct payments (as of all UC claimants)	33%	33%	33%
Number of tenants claiming full housing benefit (HB)	2,463	2,423	2,393
% of tenants claiming full HB in arrears	11%	11%	11%
Number of tenants claiming partial HB	6,647	6,571	6,553
% of tenants claiming partial HB in arrears	42%	44%	45%
Number of tenants not claiming HB	13,259	13,337	13,423
% of tenants claiming no HB in arrears	60%	60%	61%

2.6.1 Rising rent arrears remains a key challenge for the Council, with tenants struggling with additional financial pressures from rising heating charges, rent charges and increased cost of living. Whilst the arrears have increased, data in recent quarters shows a slow-down in the rate of growth. In September 2022, the Council set up a rent pilot to have a focussed team supporting residents with rent arrears. Following a review of this pilot, it is being extended as part of the Council's approach to meeting the challenge of growing arrears.

2.6.2 Camden have been working with other London boroughs with low arrears to pull together an action plan to improve the Council's rent arrears performance. Some of the actions include reviewing Camden's escalation policy and process; looking at changing and improving systems so that staff can manage cases more preventatively; and increasing the efficiency of Camden's payment systems so that it is easier to residents to pay off their arrears.

## **2.7 Anti-social behaviour (ASB)**

2.7.1 Anti-social behaviour remains a key priority for many of Camden's residents, particularly as the Council had seen the seasonal increase in ASB cases over the summer, with 56 cases opened in July, and 32 cases per month in both August and September.

2.7.2 In response to this, Housing is working with colleagues in Contact Camden and Community Safety to form an operational ASB task force to tackle issues and jointly improve processes such as the case escalation procedures and how the Council maintains contact and communication with residents reporting ASB.

2.7.3 Anti-social behaviour is also a new reporting requirement of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and is a key tenant satisfaction measure. Housing services are working towards ensuring the services' reporting arrangements are compliant with these regulations, aiming to ensure that high-quality data can be provided to the Housing Regulator in the upcoming financial year.

## **2.8 Fire Safety**

2.8.1 Ensuring the safety of Camden residents and those the Council are a landlord for is of paramount importance, and fire safety is central to this. The number of outstanding fire risk assessments (FRAs) and fire safety actions is falling each quarter. As of October 2023, Housing have completed 97% of the fire risk assessments on Camden estates. Housing is prioritising the completion of fire risk assessment actions, actively monitoring and reporting them at both the Fire Risk Compliance Safety Panel and the Housing Safety and Regulatory Board.

## **2.9 Domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and violence against women and girls (VAWG)**

2.9.1 During 2022/23, 11% (236) of homelessness cases reported domestic abuse as the main reason for loss of accommodation. DVA is disproportionately a gendered issue; in 85% of DVA homelessness cases the main applicant self-identified as a woman. Transgender applicants also are disproportionately affected, with 25% of all transgender homelessness applicants reporting fleeing domestic violence and abuse as the reason they are homelessness.

2.9.2 Strained resources, a housing crisis, and a national reduction in specialist housing provisions adds to an already challenging environment for survivors attempting to leave abusive situations. Infrastructure which enables and sustains a safe and survivor-led response within housing services is essential for

transformation to take hold. As such, Housing is working to achieve Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation and have been working with a full time DAHA Coordinator since March 2023.

2.9.3 In this area, work to co-produce a DVA Housing Policy and procedure with survivors and professionals is firmly underway and a DVA Homelessness working group has been established to work on procedural change. The Council is carrying out forensic analysis of services, such as a full case review of 290 DVA cases in housing management, and the newly established DVA data management group is working on a DVA dashboard to ensure service compliance and scrutiny.

2.9.4 Moving forward, a DVA points panel is being trailed for 3 months to assess and review applications made for domestic abuse. It is anticipated that this learning will inform changes to the Allocation Scheme. Work is being planned to ensure the sustainability of the Council's DVA multi-disciplinary team. This will depend on further resourcing DVA champions and a dedicated DVA Coordinator role in Housing Management services.

## **2.10 Complaints and members enquiries**

2.10.1 How the Council responds to enquiries and complaints leaves a marked impression on residents and service users, and there is ambition across the service to make concerted improvements in this area. For the last quarter (July to September) Housing services responded to just over a quarter (28%) of Stage 1 complaints within the target time of 10 days; and in the same period, half (49%) of all member enquiries were responded to within the same target time.

2.10.2 The service is taking actions to improve responses to complaints and members enquiries, including routing all tenancy management complaints and members enquiries to one team from December for better co-ordination and ensuring holding responses are sent where enquiries require responses from multiple teams and may take longer than the target time. Housing will be conducting an analysis of where complaints are currently being held up and reviewing some Ombudsman complaints to understand the subsequent learning that has taken place arising from them. Such learning will be built into service development and transformation plans.

## **2.11 Tenant participation and engagement**

2.11.1 Involving residents in council services is widespread across the Council, and the new social housing regulatory framework places additional emphasis on how tenants are involved in shaping their services, holding their landlord to account, having their voices heard, and being informed about performance.

2.11.2 The door-knocking exercise as part of the intensive tenant participation programme, work to increase the support that community organisations can offer to tenant groups, and the development of ongoing consultative groups are examples of developments in tenant involvement.



2.11.3 Tenants have told us they would like to see a tenant conference, and this is being planned for next year where there will be discussions on topics that tenants decide are most important to them, as well opportunities for wider consultations around how residents would like to have a greater input into their services and how any potential barriers to this can be overcome.

## **2.12 Conclusion**

2.12.1 The cost-of-living crisis is having a continued and disproportionate impact on those whose health, employment and financial resilience is comparatively low and for those whose housing security is tenuous. Service improvements across Housing are therefore very much focussed on seeking to ease the pressures residents are experiencing in these respects, within an over-stretched budget envelope. Significantly, Housing services are also looking to improve how it uses data to help it monitor progress and look for early corrective actions as necessary.

2.12.2 Feedback on the format of the report and the measures presented is welcomed.

## **2.13 Environmental implications**

2.13.1 This report provides an update on housing services activity and performance in Camden and therefore there are no environmental implications arising for the Council.

## **3. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE**

3.1 The Director of Finance has been consulted and has no comments to add.

## **4. COMMENTS OF THE BOROUGH SOLICITOR**

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

**Report ends**