

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Petra Dando (CASP) and John Webb (Kennistoun & Willingham TRA).

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS ON THIS AGENDA

There were no such declarations.

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

There were no notifications of urgent business.

6. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2023.

The DMC noted that at the meeting, under Agenda Item 4 - Election of Vice-Chair, a discussion took place, in which the role of Chair and Vice-Chair was discussed. The DMC sought clarity on what the expectations and duties of Vice-Chair were and how they worked alongside the Chair. Members also discussed the wider role of the DMC.

It was suggested, at the previous meeting, that an information report be provided to the DMC at a future meeting with the intention of explaining these points and providing clarity about the role of DMC Members, DMC Chairs and DMC Vice-Chairs.

ACTION: Tennant Participation

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record, subject to the addition above.

7. KENTISH TOWN PROGRESS REPORT - ACTION POINTS UPDATE

Void Properties

It had continued to prove difficult to obtain information from other Local Authorities on void properties.

The DMC discussed that long term void properties and rent arrears had continued to be an issue, and that policies related to these issues were in need of updating to address this. It was stated that current policies did not work for Londoners and Camden Council should lead the way on innovative ways to improve these policies and encourage people to downsize when necessary.

The Head of Neighbourhoods understood residents concerns and advised that three new Heads of Service had been appointed and moving forward work would be undertaken to improve services, and that the Council would be more transparent with residents about future plans.

Responding to a question about under occupation and downsizing, the Head of Neighbourhoods explained that the Council could not bring an assured tenancy to an end, mutual agreement or a court judgement was needed. However, there were several incentives offered to residents to encourage and assist with downsizing. Furthermore, a downsizing transformation project was underway but will take time to complete.

The meeting noted that some residents did not know about the incentives as they were not clearly advertised and that the strict allocation policy could cause issues for residents who are ready to move but don't want to leave their estate or local area.

The Head of Neighbourhoods informed the DMC that the allocations and voids deep dive meeting was to be arranged and would provide DMC Members with more information and the work that was being undertaken by the service.

ACTION: Head of Innovation & Improvement

Master Key Scheme

A response had been provided to CASP in relation to the statement they made on the Master Key Scheme at the meeting of the DMC that took place on 13 June 2023. It was noted that the reply had been circulated.

The Action Point Update was noted.

8. HOUSING SERVICES CONSOLIDATED REPORT

Consideration was given to the consolidated report of the Director of Housing Management and the Director of Property Services.

HRA Budget Monitoring Update

Michael Webb (Head of Finance, Supporting Communities) presented the report which provided an overview of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). It provided an outturn for 2022/23 and the budgeted and forecast expenditure and income for 2023/24.

The Head of Finance noted that there was a correction to the report on page 34 of the agenda pack. The report incorrectly stated that “interest payable is also forecast to be £2.6m over budget due to rising interest rates.” This figure should have stated £3.6 million.

Responding to questions and comments from DMC Members, Officers provided the following information:

- In terms of energy costs, leaseholders were given an estimated cost and charged based on this, if the actual figure is higher leaseholders would then be required to pay the difference.
- Depending on the next Bank of England announcement regarding the interest rate, some HRA borrowing would be impacted and a revised estimate would be formulated. It was hoped that the interest rate would soon start to decrease.
- The main objective for the Community Investment Programme (CIP) was to provide replacement and additional council housing. Properties in council estates that had reached end of lifecycle were replaced with new properties. There was a set process which determined where regeneration needed to take place.
- A further aim of the CIP was to reduce repairs expenditure by regenerating the estates which need the most repairs.
- The only way the CIP scheme generated income was by selling flats privately, but in addition to these private flats, the council replaced existing council properties and built additional properties.
- The intention of the Better Homes programme was to invest in and improve existing housing stock. The Council wanted homes to be safe and in good condition and the Better Homes programme enabled the Council to do this.
- Concerns about damp and mould were noted and the Council was working on this issue.
- The Council wanted to demonstrate to residents how improvements to services would be achieved, and communications would be sent to residents providing more information on improvement strategies on this information was available.
- The CIP Scheme was projected to break even. Private sales covered the costs of new social housing and replacing old housing. With development schemes there was always risk involved, but as a whole it was expected that the programme would break even.
- Forward buying and the LASER Scheme had helped lower the costs to residents, as there were examples of other local authorities that had not forward purchased and residents there were faced with even higher costs.

- Gas prices were decreasing but not at the pace that would mean prices could be lowered in year. This would be reassessed when charges were determined for the next financial year.
- When energy prices went up in April, the increase was estimated at about 290% and the only way it could be lowered was by drawing on reserves, but as a result of that there was a gap in the reserves which needed to be replenished.
- In terms of rents arrears, clarity would be sought on whether the accounts in credit impacted on the arrears figure. This was discussed at the previous meeting, and it was explained that arrears figures in the report quotes the arrears figure, without adjusting it for credits. This position would be confirmed, and an explanation provided prior to the next DMC meeting.

ACTION: Head of Allocations, Lettings and Private Housing Services

- In terms of calculating the rent increase for the next financial year, there were so many variables it was difficult to predict what this might be. Normally, the increase would be inflation + 1% but this approach might not be taken as the Cost of Living Crisis needed to be taken into account.
- Unauthorised tenants were discovered through various measures, but one of the main indicators was when someone passed away and there was an unauthorised resident living there who is not on the tenancy. In these instances, the unauthorised tenant will be required to pay a use and occupation charge if they continue to occupy the property. All reports of a resident passing are followed up quickly to establish if there is someone unauthorised residing in the property.

Regarding CIP, Better Homes and Repairs, Councillor Apak (Cabinet Member for Better Homes) advised that other residents had shared similar concerns and therefore it would be important to have a discussion to explain these schemes in more detail and some of the work the council is planning to undertake to improve repairs. The Cabinet Member considered that it might be appropriate to use some time at the deep dive meeting that was being arranged to discuss the schemes in more depth so residents can have a fuller understanding.

ACTION: Head of Asset Management

Repairs

Hannah Ashley Fraser (Head of Asset Management) provided the following information in response to questions from DMC Members:

- The heating works and improvements that were taking place would be funded within the existing budget as there were no government funds available to cover these works.
- Improvements had been underway with damp and mould and whilst there were 155 new reports in July, these were dealt with swiftly. Inspections and

check ups were being carried out and findings passed on to the repairs team for action.

- Camden no longer installed individual boilers on estates where communal heating was available, as individual systems were less efficient than communal systems.
- Those residents who did have boilers should receive instructions and demonstrations on how to use them if their system was installed or replaced. If there were instances where this did not happen, these should be reported so a demonstration can be arranged.

Fire safety

Hannah Ashley Fraser (Head of Asset Management) advised that there was a programme across all estates to install smoke alarms that were wired into the mains electricity. This work was being undertaken in order to comply with legislation and was to be completed by March 2024. However, there was currently a programme running alongside this to install battery powered smoke alarms in properties that required them as an interim measure. It was reported that caretakers had been trained to undertake this work and would be doing so alongside their other caretaking duties.

Concern was expressed by a DMC Member that this work had meant that other caretaking duties were not being fulfilled. It was explained by officers that caretakers had been instructed to do this alongside their other work and that it was targeted work, and smoke alarms would only be checked in properties where it was known that an alarm required installation or those properties where this status was unclear. Caretakers had been checking properties and taking photographs to evidence that the smoke alarms had been fitted. Furthermore, the DMC noted that Caretakers were known to residents so they would be granted access by those residents who might otherwise be wary of letting an unknown contractor into their home.

Whilst the London Fire Brigade could undertake fire safety inspections and help vulnerable people install alarms, the alarms needed to be fitted in certain positions and Caretakers had been trained to do this, therefore it was more appropriate that Caretakers carried out this work.

Whilst some of the records for certain properties were detailed, those with a boiler for example, there were others where it was not as clear which alarms were installed, therefore it was important to target those properties to ensure compliance.

A representative from Holly Lodge Residents Association provided an update on some of the fire safety and fire alarm issues on the estate and advised that a meeting about fire safety had been scheduled and the London Fire Brigade would be in attendance. It was hoped that these issues would soon be resolved.

A representative from St Pancras Way TRA reported that there had been an issue on the estate with the installation of new Fire Doors. Residents had been informed that the fire doors could not be installed due to the doorframes not being suitable,

despite having been advised that the doors had been purchased and were ready for installation. The Head of Asset Management advised that this issue would be investigated, and an update provided to the TRA.

ACTION: Head of Asset Management

The meeting expressed concern about the dangerous fire risk caused by lithium batteries in e-scooters, e-bikes and mobility scooters. Officers advised that tenancy agreements stated that storage of combustible materials was not permitted so offending items were removed from communal areas based upon this rationale and several communications had been circulated requesting that e-scooters be removed. Furthermore, visual inspections were undertaken weekly to ensure that fire risk assessments were being adhered to.

Assurance was sought that the Council had up to date records on where gas mains could be switched off. Officers responded that Mechanical and Electrical Services had an asset register which was an accurate record of where mains were located and would be dispatched to an estate quickly in a fire or other emergency to switch these off.

DMC Members noted that Cadent Gas had been undertaking works on some of the Estates in Kentish Town and sought clarity if the Council was aware of this work. The Head of Asset Management advised that the Council would be aware of these works but would seek confirmation from the relevant service.

ACTION: Mechanical & Electrical Manager

CCTV

Responding to a question, Officers advised that the priority list for CCTV installation was based on the number of reports of crime and antisocial behaviour reported on estates.

Neighbourhoods

The DMC requested an update on the resident visits. Officers advised that these visits would be undertaken as soon as possible, but the Estate Pop Ups that took place during the week had been prioritised.

Officers reported that issues with recruitment had continued, and some teams were understaffed as a result, but recruitment was underway. Some of the issues encountered were part of a national trend of Officers leaving Housing roles, in the wake of Grenfell and due to increased pressures in customer facing roles. Data provided by the Health and Safety team demonstrated that verbal and physical abuse against staff was increasing. Work was undertaken to attract people to the roles, including offering apprenticeships to young people and those wanting to get back into employment.

Responding to follow up questions, Officers advised that:

- The Job Hub in Queens Crescent had been offering training classes for Maths and English to support people seeking apprenticeships.
- Neighbourhood Managers were encouraged to work within the community, which had meant that sometimes they were not available at their desks to take calls, however it would be ensured that residents were informed of the communication channels available to reach Officers.
- Availability of information would be improved so residents could more easily identify who their points of contact were at the Council.
- A Digital Transformation Programme was underway which had already been effective in resolving cases more effectively and enabled residents to contact the Council more easily. This work would continue to be rolled out to improve services for residents.

Grounds Maintenance

Issues with grounds maintenance had continued across some estates, with work not being undertaken despite several requests. Some TRA Representatives were disappointed that actions that had been agreed at estate walkabouts had not been completed.

Officers responded that Greenspaces would be advised of the ongoing issues with the grounds maintenance service. Responding to a follow up question, Officers reported that the current contract with Idverde was due to expire and that the contract would be retendered soon.

The consolidated housing report was noted.

9. KENTISH TOWN DMC BUDGET

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Landlord Services.

Tara Cookson (Neighbourhood Manager) introduced the report and outlined the bids received. The Neighbourhood Manager specified that the installation of the Gerda security panels were officer lead bids and the panels had been effective on the estates where they had already been installed.

Representatives from Whittington TRA had attended the meeting but left before they were able to support their bid. Therefore, it was not possible to seek clarity on specific details of the gardening project, therefore Whittington TRA would be invited to resubmit the bid to the December meeting.

Torriano Estate TRA clarified details of their bid, highlighting that the money would be spend on items for the TRA Hall, which would enable the hall to be hired out, such as tables, chairs and other furniture, kitchen equipment, toys, and speakers.

RESOLVED –

THAT the following requests be approved:

TRA	BID REQUEST	AMOUNT
81-83 Camden Road	2 x LFB drop key gerda security panels to main entrance doors	£1,750.00
85-89 Camden Road	2 x LFB drop key gerda security panels to main entrance doors	£1,750.00
Torriano Estate TRA	Equipment for TRA hall	£1,500.00
Charlton Court	2 x LFB drop key gerda security panels to main entrance doors	£1,500.00

10. KENTISH TOWN INFORMATION REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Neighbourhoods.

Tara Cookson (Neighbourhood Manager) provided an overview of the report and highlighted that the work at St Pancras Way was proving to be more complicated than initially thought due to planning and building regulations, a more substantive update would be provided to the TRA prior to the next meeting.

The meeting were further advised that it had not yet been possible to complete the redesign of refuse storage arrangements at Leighton Crescent, but alternatives had been proposed, including the installation of a MetroSTOR bin store. Representatives of Leighton Crescent TRA explained that there had been issues surrounding the proposed location of the bin store, but a solution was needed to prevent animals and vermin getting to the bins.

An Ingestre Road TRA Representative presented their update, as outlined in the information report.

Responding to a question about addressing fly tipping on the estate, officers advised that, unfortunately, it was not possible for a camera be installed to deter fly tipping but physical deterrents could be considered instead and that Environmental Services could be asked to advise on a solution to address this issue.

Responding to a question about the rent arrears table shown within the report, it was explained that the total number of residential accounts and the number of accounts in arrears had a sharp increase after November 2022 because there had been a boundary change and Camden Square Ward had been added into Kentish Town DMC area.

The Neighbourhood Manager invited DMC Members to send her updates from their estates for inclusion in the next report.

The report was noted.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

The Chair requested an urgent update on the use of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) and sought confirmation if RAAC had been identified in any Council properties.

The Head of Asset Management advised that schools were the priority and were currently being investigated and a statement would be released. However, there was no indication that any of Camden's schools were affected. In terms of other council properties, this was an emerging issue that had not yet been investigated. Once work was underway in this area, residents would be informed of any surveys, findings and identified risks.

A DMC Member raised concern about asbestos on their estate. The Head of Asset Management advised that if asbestos was encapsulated it was considered a managed risk and disturbing it was avoided.

Councillor Slater advised that he had some helpful written information about asbestos that he would circulate to the relevant TRA.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.

CHAIR

Contact Officer: Rebecca Taylor

Telephone No: 020 7974 8177

E-Mail: Rebecca.Taylor@camden.gov.uk

MINUTES END