

## **THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN**

At a meeting of the **LEASEHOLDERS' FORUM** held on **TUESDAY, 19TH MARCH, 2024** at 7.00 pm in Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

Patrick Hagopian (Vice-chair in the Chair)  
Brigitte Ascher  
Azra Bloomfield  
Philip Dunne (joined remotely)  
David Hart (joined remotely)  
Rosalie Miles  
Carolyn Morgan  
Joy Palmer  
Louise Upton  
Richard Walker  
Peter Wright

### **OTHER LEASEHOLDERS PRESENT (On-line)**

Attia Hafeez  
Bharti Vaja  
Catharine Wells  
Charlotte Myhrum  
Jennifer Fauquet  
Margherita Sprio  
Nadia Halloway  
Preethi Reddy  
Shane Allen  
Sue Knox  
Sylvain Bertrand

### **ALSO PRESENT**

Councillor Nancy Jirira  
Councillor James Slater (Cabinet Adviser on Improving Services to Camden Leaseholders) (Remote attendance)  
Thomas Broad (Consultation and Engagement Manager)  
Nermin Hassan (Casework Team Manager)  
Tony Castle (Head of Repairs and Operations)  
Sean Scott (Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income) (remote attendance)  
Sola Odusina, Principal Committee Officer

**These minutes are in draft form only and therefore not approved or amended until the next meeting of the Leaseholders' Forum. Please note that these minutes include opinions expressed by the attendees at the meeting and should not be regarded as giving advice.**

## **MINUTES**

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Vice Chair in the absence of the Chair, chaired the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Isabella Luger, Karl Vaughan and Wolfram Westendorf.

Councillor Apak (Cabinet Member for Better Homes) had also given his apologies.

Other Forum members not present included Aldires Bugia, Billy Byatt, Martyn Swain, and Dr Clive Sneddon.

The Forum was informed that as the Microsoft Teams chat had been disabled non-Forum members in virtual attendance who had questions or comments during the meeting could email these to ([leaseholdersforum@gmail.com](mailto:leaseholdersforum@gmail.com)). These questions and comments from non-Forum members would be monitored and responded to during the course of the meeting.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA**

There were none.

### **3. MINUTES**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting of 13th December 2023 and the actions arising from those minutes.

### **RESOLVED –**

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 13th December 2023 be approved as an accurate record.

### **4. PROGRESS REPORT AND MATTERS ARISING**

Matters Arising from the minutes 13<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income Update

The Communications member confirmed that the slides presented by the Head of Leaseholder Services and link to the Housing Ombudsman information referred to at

the last meeting, had been received and published on Camden Leaseholders' Forum website.

Any other Business- Fire Safety Programme

The Vice Chair referred to an issue raised by a Forum member relating to dissatisfaction with the response to a query received from a Council officer.

He reported that this had been subsequently taken up by the Cabinet Member for Better Homes, which he believed Councillors should do for the sake of maintaining accountability and was an example of how accountability should work. Commenting further he informed the Forum that if a person was not getting a response to a query or dissatisfied with the response from a Council officer one of the remedies was Councillors could raise a member enquiry on behalf of residents, noting that there were local ward Councillors that could represent and raise issues for Leaseholders.

A response relating to the Council's Complaints Procedure and Compensation had been received which was on pages 47 to 50 of the agenda.

**5. LEASEHOLDERS' SERVICES UPDATE**

This is covered under the Leaseholder Services Working Group update.

**6. FORUM WORKING GROUP AND ACTIVITY REPORTS**

Consideration was given to the update from the following Working Groups.

Major Works Working Group

The Vice-chair informed the Forum that information relating to the work of the Working Group was on page 29 of the main agenda and page 3 of the Supplementary Agenda.

The issue of how projects moved from the stock condition survey until they were taken up and ultimately ended up on the list of planned works in the Camden Account was addressed.

The Vice- chair commented that it was difficult to find the link to the list of planned works on the Camden account, this had been demonstrated by an informal survey of leaseholders as well as by a brief experiment conducted at the meeting. The difficulty in finding the link was because it was not one of the principal links on the right-hand side of the page rather it could be found under the property details link. To compound matters the link was not controlled by the Major Works department but was the responsibility of Leaseholder Services who were in charge of this page.

A suggested solution was that the heading 'Property Details' should be changed to Property Details / Planned Works. There followed a discussion where it was

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commented that the words property details would not suggest anything to think that was where you could find information on planned works.

Forum members were informed that there was a continuing dialogue about proposals for a compensation scheme when a contractor missed an appointment or cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice. Leaseholders were reminded that the Forum passed a resolution at the September 2023 Forum meeting that contractors should take the responsibility to turn up for appointments seriously, and it would be reasonable to penalise contractors if they did not turn up or cancelled without sufficient notice. It would be reasonable to compensate a resident who had waited at home for an appointment where the contractor had failed to turn up.

Further to that meeting this was followed up with an exchange of correspondence where ultimately it was noted that the Council had a complaints procedure through which it was possible to ask for compensation. This was on pages 47 to 50 of the main agenda. The tariff of compensation amounts were drawn from Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman guidance.

The Vice Chair was of the view that amounts of compensation in the document did not contemplate the circumstance that was addressed by the Forum resolution of September 2023 i.e. the circumstance where a leaseholder, resident waited at home in vain for an appointment, having to reorganise their daily life and take time off work.

The Vice Chair suggested that an appropriate benchmark was the statutory compensation amount offered by utility companies for missed appointments which was £30.

The Vice Chair asked for feedback from Forum members on what they felt was the most effective format in which to receive information about the costs of a major works project, where they would like to see the information, in what detail and at what stage?

There followed a discussion in which Forum members provided personal experience of situations where they had requested detailed breakdown information on large major works project bills, service charge and repairs bills. There was a suggestion that more detailed information might be useful to leaseholders at the stage when the project went live.

A Forum member raised the issue of a 60% increase in their service charge bill and not knowing what the increase was for, as there was no breakdown. The Head of Repairs agreeing with another comment from a Forum member that Leaseholders should be able to see a breakdown of details of the work done on their behalf, said he would take these issues away and discuss with the Head of Capital Works.

### **Action By Head of Repairs**

The Vice Chair said that the Head of Capital Works had been open to receiving feedback on the issue of how much detail to provide with regards to Major works bills, noting however, that input from Leaseholder Services was also required as well

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as the need to consider the legal implications. With this in mind feedback would continue to be sought and fed into the process to find the most effective way of delivering the information for the benefit of leaseholders dealing with major works.

### Leaseholder Services Working Group

With regards to and texts and emails to Leaseholders as an interim step prior to dispatching a legal letter, the Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income informed the Forum that notifications were sent out to leaseholders reminding them that their quarterly payments were due.

Responding to a Forum member's question about whether the interim step had been successful, he said that there was no direct outcome to analyse as bulk messages had been sent out but within 24 hours of the email being sent £122,000 in service charge payments was received from leaseholders. A similar thing was done in February for the 2024/25 bill estimates and a fair amount of income was received. It appeared that leaseholders welcomed the email reminders as prompts encouraging them to contact the service.

Answering further questions the Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income gave the following information:

- The service had 9,500 leaseholder email addresses, some of which would include joint leaseholders, so might be multiple email addresses for the same person but it appeared to be for the majority of the leasehold stock.
- With regards to an update on the Correspondence Management System, there had been some progress. There was an ongoing overarching review of the Council's IT systems in the Housing and Repairs departments looking at what the systems requirements were across the service. The plan at the end of the process was to rationalise what the requirements were and develop a programme with the ultimate aim of having a system that was overarching.
- The overarching IT system review was a separate project to the Leaseholder Service redesign project. The IT systems review was being led by IT colleagues with input from a senior manager steering group.
- The Housing Transformation Programme as discussed at previous Leaseholder Forum meetings was a review of the housing department was doing and how it was delivered across the whole directorate. The Service design team had carried out a 4-month discovery piece of work, working with Leaseholders, the Leaseholders Forum, integrated with some of the work the Cabinet Adviser on Improving services to Leaseholders had done. This had provided a comprehensive picture of all the areas that could be improved in the short and medium term as well as a broader picture that needed to link into how the service was set up as part of the redesign work and the systems being used.
- There were a lot of things happening, there was the Housing Regulator, Ombudsman Review and Leaseholder reform happening externally, while internally there was Housing Transformation Programme, Leaseholder

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Services redesign, review of Digital Design services and the Leaseholder Satisfaction Survey which had just closed, as well as Councillor Slater's report. The intention was to look at the structure, how the service was operating and then set out an improvement and delivery plan which would set out the road map to address the issues that had come out.

- It was hoped that there would be a process plan available by the next Leaseholders Forum meeting in May 2024. It was hoped that in April/May Leaseholder Services would work with some services to test some ideas to determine whether some quick wins could be achieved as well as short term improvements. There would also be an idea of the medium-term things that could be done, this could be shared as well as provide some indication of what the long-term road map would look like.

### **Action By: Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Income**

- The Leaseholder Survey was conducted by telephone. It was completed last week.
- It was hoped that the results of the survey would be available by the next meeting in May 2024.
- Leaseholders were asked to pass any feedback they had on the survey to either the Vice Chair Patrick Hagopian or Carolyn Morgan

### **Action By: all leaseholders**

- The golden thread was going to be applied across the whole of the housing stock, which meant that the information relating to the history of all work done on a building would be maintained on the Council's database. Responding to a question had been touched on in the Head of Leaseholder Services and Housing Incomes verbal update.

Councillor Slater (Cabinet Adviser on Improving Services to Camden Leaseholders) was in attendance to provide a further update on his report.

The Vice Chair advised that Carolyn Morgan presented a deputation supporting the report recommendations to the Council's Housing Scrutiny Committee in February.

Councillor Slater outlined the 8 recommendations he had made to Cabinet, 2 related to housing repairs.

- Ensuring that Repairs and Leaseholder Services worked more closely together reviewing how that worked, the other related to holding contractors accountable for their work to ensure quality assurance took place.
- With regards to leaseholder services, supporting the introduction of a Correspondence Management System, to review how written communication could be made more accessible, more transparent and to evaluate information on the website.
- Leaseholders and freeholders to complete an annual audit of best practice from other boroughs.

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- Providing information on the Council's website about the roles and responsibilities of different teams within the Council so people knew who to contact.
- The introduction of a formal Councillor role similar to a deputy Cabinet Member in other Councils to ensure that leaseholders voices were thoroughly represented and heard across different Council departments.

He Commented that:

- The Housing Scrutiny Committee valued the Leaseholders Forum perspective and endorsed all the recommendations. Next steps involved The Cabinet Member for Better Homes will provide a response at the Cabinet meeting 5<sup>th</sup> June, although his formal response would likely be available before the Cabinet meeting.
- He felt it had been useful for Councillors and hopefully Leaseholder Services for issues to be looked at with a fresh pair of eyes, to sum up the views on the street and he would continue to engage with Councillors, Tenants Residents Associations (TRAs), District Management Committees (DMC's) and Leaseholder bodies going forward.
- Councillor Slater provided the following information to questions:
- The appointment to a deputy Cabinet role was a decision for the leader of the Council to make.
- The Leaseholders Forum could make representations to the leader directly. Housing Scrutiny had also endorsed the recommendation and individual leaseholders had raised it with their ward Councillors.
- Leaseholders Forum requested that the Forum Vice Chair write to the Leader of the Council endorsing the recommendation for the appointment of Deputy Cabinet Member for Leaseholders role.

### **Action By Vice Chair Leaseholders Forum**

- Leaseholders were represented by the TRA's and TRA's were part of the DMC's.
- The money/funding goes to the TRA's which was understood to be a policy decision.
- Gospel Oak DMC at their next meeting were waiting for an explanation of what funding could be applied for.

### Energy Working Group

The report was noted.

### Newsletter /Communications Working Group

The Vice Chair explained that as a favour to the Forum the Council sent out the Forum's newsletter postal mailing to all leaseholders. He encouraged those leaseholders not on Camden Leaseholders' Forum mailing list to join the distribution list.

The Vice Chair reported that on a few occasions the Council had wanted to edit the Leaseholders Forum newsletter because of honest criticism notably the paragraph relating to the Council's repair service not working on page 7 of the Supplementary Agenda. A compromise was proposed where the Leaseholders' Forum agreed to delete the paragraph relating to repairs subject to inserting a statement saying that the Council had the right to edit the newsletter referring people to the unedited version on the Leaseholders Forum website. The Vice Chair reported that Senior Officers did not accept the compromise and declined to include that version and circulate the newsletter.

A general discussion followed on the pros and cons of the Forum sending out the newsletter independently, how the newsletter could be circulated more widely to leaseholders and whether Leaseholders were actually interested or read the newsletter. It was pointed out that the future approach would depend on who was in office and creating the newsletter.

The Communications member commended the Council on its homeowner's newsletter that was sent out with service charge demands commenting that it had a lot of useful information about energy prices and online surgeries.

## **RESOLVED**

That the Working Group Activity reports be noted.

## **7. REPAIRS: UPDATE ON PERFORMANCE AND OPERATIONS**

Consideration was given to the Repairs Update on Performance and Operations report.

David Hart presented the report referring to pages 43 to 45 of the main agenda highlighting the engagement the Repairs Working Group had with the Council over the past 3 months.

He informed the meeting that he had recently been made aware that when contacting the Contact Centre to report a repair, if the repair already had a repair number, it would have been logged and allocated to a contractor or the repairs team. If there was any problem the contact centre would ask that maintenance contractor or repairs team was contacted directly. It was only new repairs that could be discussed with the contact centre which would then be allocated.

He commented that there appeared to be a lack of oversight of the maintenance contractors. This was summarised on page 45 of the agenda noting that there were serious issues about management of M&E repairs where over a period of a month there were scores of repairs jobs raised for the same issue which had then been closed down without being fixed, with contractors wanting to turn up in the middle of



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the night to carry out repairs. He was of the view that this required an investigation and response from the Head of Repairs who was in attendance.

He also referred to page 43 asking for officers Thomas Broad (Consultation and Engagement Manager) and Nermin Hassan (Casework Team Manager) to provide an update on the issues relating to A to D.

In response Thomas Broad provided the following information.

- In relation to contact centre operational changes a key change was the introduction of the SMS update service for when lifts broke down and stopped working. It had been trialled at Taplow Estate in the autumn and had now been rolled out to about 11 high rise blocks. Whenever a lift broke down, stopped working or was receiving regular maintenance an SMS update was sent to residents attached to that lift. He reported that the trials had gone really well and positive feedback had been received. This was being rolled out to all the other buildings with lifts starting with the tallest buildings. Contact numbers on record were being used, however everybody was welcomed and encouraged to sign up for text alerts.
- The SMS system would also be extended to district heating as well. Which was likely to be ready by September.

Nermin Hassan (Casework Team Manager) referred to the Case Management table on page 43 of the main agenda highlighting that the figure provided for February 2024 was incorrect, the correct figure was 90% of cases was expected to close within 10 working days explaining that her team worked hard to continue with service improvement.

She reported that a slight dip in performance occurred from August last year with a reduction in the number of cases closed within 10 working days. She said that this was due to some members of staff leaving, issues with recruitment and October being the peak season for heating and hot water.

Performance was improving and had improved compared to this time last year 147 cases were received, 75% of which were closed in 10 working days, highlighting that it was just past the middle of March, 166 cases had been received and 88.6% had been closed within 10 working days.

In response to questions the following information was provided:

- In relation to the other 20% that were not closed within 10 working days, the exact figures were not to hand, but it was usually about 2 further days or a bit longer as further information or inspection was required.
- The average length of time taken was measured as well as how many were over 10, 12 days and the reasons for this when the statistics were compiled. The Team was very open and transparent about figures which were also published on the website.

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- The number of complaints had gone up considerably in January, it was pointed out that this was mainly because people had been encouraged to complain particularly with the Ombudsman publicising and promoting ways to complain.
- Complaints in relation to the number of orders completed in a year was less than 2% in total.

A Forum member commented that they were of the view that there should be a culture shift from the Council towards leaseholders who should be respected. There were some blocks with a mix of Council tenants and leaseholders and a block repair to the roof took up to 3 months.

Tony Castle, (Head of Repairs) commented on the improved repairs reporting and tracking system mentioning that he did not have an implementation date but work on and development of the system was continuing, informing the Forum that he would like to invite members to take part in the testing of the system when it got to that stage as he would like as much feedback as possible.

A Leaseholder in virtual attendance was invited to ask a question and commented on her personal experience of repair work and the issue not being resolved until it was escalated to Councillor and MP level. The Leaseholder also queried whether the case management performance figures had been independently verified and whether the issue had been resolved or whether there had just been an investigation opened and completed.

A Forum member commented that although the statistics presented painted a wonderful picture, in reality based on feedback from DMC's, Leaseholders and Leaseholder Forum members experience and evidence of performance was far from wonderful. What appeared to be occurring was that the problem was identified, a person was identified to deal with the problem and a recommendation made as to what was to be done. However, resolution of the problem took much longer often up to 12 months or more which was not acceptable. The member commented that it was when the problem was actually resolved that should be recorded in the statistics.

The Head of Repairs commented that GEM Contractors had their issues, two of their officers were now based in the Council offices, alongside the Repairs team, 3 days a week. This started in February and this was now showing signs of improvement although major improvement would not happen overnight. He further commented that GEM does not sign off its own work.

The Service was working on lessons learned from issues raised, this involved looking at case histories and drilling down into the reasons for the issues. It was hoped that this would be carried out within the next 6 months so concrete data would be available and information would be provided to the Forum.

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Common themes were being identified from the complaints as well as the issues raised around contractors turning up late at night or not turning up on time. This would be taken away and fed into the work around common themes.

Officers were thanked for attending and responses to questions.

**Resolved**

That the report be noted.

**8. VACANCIES FOR MEMBERS IN HAMPSTEAD**

The Vice Chair informed members that there were 3 Hampstead member vacancies on the Forum encouraging virtual attendees or friends to stand for the vacancies.

It was noted that Thomas Watkins had resigned his membership. The Forum acknowledged and thanked him for his service.

**9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.

**CHAIR**

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**MINUTES END**