

Camden Leaseholders Forum Repairs Working Group

This is a sixth interim report by the Repairs Working Group

Repairs Service reporting to the CLF

The last CLF meeting, on 19 March, was attended by Nermin Hassan (Casework Team Manager) and Thomas Broad (Consultation and Engagement Manager) for the Property Customer Services & Engagement team and by Tony Castle who is Head of the Repairs Operations team.

Contact Centre Operational Changes

The Repairs Contact Centre is within the Property Customer Services and Engagement team.

In relation to contact centre operational changes a key change was the introduction of the SMS (telephone messaging) update service for when lifts broke down and stopped working. It had been trialled at Taplow Estate in Autumn 2023 and had now been rolled out to about 11 high rise blocks. Whenever a lift broke down, stopped working or was receiving regular maintenance the M&E team sends an SMS update to residents attached to that lift. This is being rolled out to the other 500+ buildings with lifts, starting with the tallest buildings.

As a starting point, Camden is using the mobile numbers stored on their housing & repairs system (which is linked to the Camden Account), cross-referenced to a list of addresses attached to each lift. When the SMS service is launched at a particular block, residents can supply new/alternative mobile numbers if they wish - or opt out.

Camden plans to extend the SMS update service to district heating repairs in Autumn 2024.

The CLF Repairs working group has been invited to arrange a visit to the Contact Centre to see the team in operation.

Repairs Complaints and Councillor Referrals

When someone first submits a formal complaint relating to the repairs service it is investigated by the local Casework team which is in Property Customer Services & Engagement.

Their target is to respond to all submissions within 10 working days. The team is worked hard to continue with service improvement to achieve this target.

Performance data is published on the Camden website at <https://www.camden.gov.uk/housing-repairs-data>.

The table below shows a dip in performance from August. This was explained as being due to staff shortage (some staff leaving and then difficulties in recruiting). In addition to this there was the impact of heating and water season from October onwards.

Case management performance previous year

Month	Cases handled	Resolved within 10 working days
April 2024	280	84.6%
March 2024	290	87.7%
February 2024	303	90.8%
January 2024	403	53%
December 2023	256	50%
November 2023	206	54%
October 2023	190	53%
September 2023	92	64%
August 2023	62	63%
July 2023	118	70%
June 2023	150	75%
May 2023	170	72%
April 2023	212	66%

Repairs Complaints (stage 1, table from Camden’s website)

Where cases were not closed within 10 working days, this was reported to be usually where further information or inspection was required. CLF has asked to see the more detailed analysis which has been done - namely resolution periods after 10 days, the number of complaints upheld and the number of cases which get appealed to the 2nd stage?

The number of complaints went up considerably in January. It was thought that this was mainly because people had been encouraged to complain, particularly with the Housing Ombudsman publicising and promoting ways to complain.

Nevertheless, the number of complaints submitted was less than 2% of the total number of repairs orders completed in a year.

It should be borne in mind that where a complaint was upheld and closed within 10 working days it does not follow that the problem was resolved. With the problem identified, and a person is assigned to deal with it, several months may elapse before the repairs problem is finally resolved.

Repairs Operations team

The Head of Repairs has acknowledged some shortcomings in the management of appointments and work carried out by M&E maintenance contractor GEM. Since we provided Camden with four case studies last January this has been reviewed and we are told that measures have been taken to improve the situation. Since February, two of GEM’s officers are now based in the Council offices three days a week,

alongside the M&E Repairs team. We are told that this is now showing signs of improvement although major improvement would not happen overnight.

It had appeared to us, from the evidence available, that there was also room for improvement in Camden's oversight of its maintenance contractors. Contractors were missing appointments, turning up late at night and incorrectly recording work as completed. We asked whether GEM was marking its own homework to which the Head of Repairs was adamant that this is not the case.

The Repairs Service is 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 CLF.

Repairs Reporting and Tracking System

Camden is developing a new repairs reporting system, with supplier Madetech. This will let residents report and track repairs online themselves and will replace the repairs reporting tool on the Camden Account. It is said to be nearly ready for initial testing and CLF has been invited to assist with this.