

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY, 16TH JULY, 2024** at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Kemi Atolagbe (Chair), Meric Apak, Richard Cotton, Nasrine Djemai, Tommy Gale, Eddie Hanson, Nancy Jirira and Victor Seedman (co-opted member)

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillor Samata Khatoon and Charles Bertlin and Larissa Hope (co-opted members)

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Pat Callaghan, Cabinet Member Safer Communities for items 6 and 9
Councillor Sagal Abdi-Wali, Cabinet Member Better Homes

The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Samata Khatoon and Charles Bertlin and Larissa Hope, Co-opted Members.

2. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF STATUTORY DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS, COMPULSORY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND VOLUNTARY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS IN MATTERS ON THIS AGENDA

There were none.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Broadcast of the meeting

The Chair announced that the meeting was being broadcast live by the Council to the Internet and could be viewed on the website for twelve months after the meeting.

After that time, webcasts were archived and could be made available upon request. Those who had asked to address the meeting were deemed to be consenting to having their contributions recorded and broadcast and to the use of those sound recordings and images for webcasting and/or training purposes.

4. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT

There were none.

5. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd February 2024.

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd February 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

6. DEPUTATIONS

A deputation was received from Jeremy and Joyce Yankey regarding support for the deaf community in relation to housing service engagement.

Jeremy then gave the following key responses to questions;

- The deputation felt that Islington Council were making progress regarding the support they were making available to the deaf community so Camden should look there as a point of good practice.
- The deputation suggested that the Council should look at enabling the deaf community to make video messages using BSL to allow them to raise their concerns.

The Chair then thanked Jeremy and Joyce for their deputation.

Members noted the good work being done by the Disability Advisory Panel of the Council in relation to identifying issues of concern and seeking service improvements for people with disabilities. Members also asked that officers provide a briefing note to the scrutiny committee regarding the current service offer for all people with disabilities, and how this could be improved going forward.

**ACTION BY: Director of Housing and the
Director of Property Management**

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A deputation was then received from Jon Glackin, Streets Kitchen, regarding the Review of Rough Sleepers report on the agenda for the meeting.

Jon gave the following key response to questions:

- The deputation wished to see the Council and the voluntary sector work in partnership to seek to help rough sleepers. The review had not sought to include all groups working in that sector, and the review's recommendation should be delayed to allow for these groups to be involved and have genuine independence from the Council.
- The Homelessness Forum that was in place was being merged with the Homelessness Transformation Forum, and needed greater involvement of voluntary sector groups who were involved in service provision in this area.

The Chair then thanked Jon for his deputation.

7. TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED

THAT the terms of reference of the scrutiny committee as set out below be approved;

'To scrutinise the Council's policies and the provision, planning, financing, management and performance of services relating to housing provided by the Supporting Communities Directorate and other service providers'.

8. APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS 2024/25

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Property Management.

RESOLVED –

THAT Vic Seedman, Larissa Hope and Charles Bertlin be appointed as non-voting co-opted members on the scrutiny committee for the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

9. REVIEW OF ROUGH SLEEPING SERVICES

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director Adults and Health.

Councillor Pat Callaghan, Cabinet Member Safer Communities, and Jess McGregor, Executive Director Adults and Health, took the meeting through the report and they along with Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, gave the following key responses to questions:

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- The Executive Director had been charged to undertake the review as she was independent from the providers of the service within the Council and was the Council's statutory officer responsible for adults. All appropriate groups had been invited to be involved in the review and had been sent a copy of the draft report for comments. Street Kitchens, though part of the review, had helped shape some of the proposals, but had not taken up the offer of commenting on the draft report.
- The Council had and would continue to lobby the Government to seek funding to pay for the provision of support needed to help non-uk national rough sleepers. It was hoped that the new Government would look differently at this issue and provide resources for local authorities to fully fund this work.
- The Council was seeking to develop a clear understanding of its role in supporting rough sleepers, how to maximise the use of its resources to help them, as well as the enforcement considerations around crime and anti-social behaviour that affected local communities. The Police were there to enforce the law, and Council staff were there to provide support and care for the rough sleepers. The need to clarify roles had come out of an event arranged by Street Kitchens.
- Gambling, drugs and alcohol abuse were all routes into rough sleeping, and once a person was sleeping rough it often only took the individual a few weeks before they started taking drugs or undertaking alcohol abuse.
- Camden was always likely to be a destination for rough sleepers due to it being a major transport hub, so the Council had to think about what a fully costed optimum rough sleeper service looked like going forward. This should ensure the Council was able to make clear decisions about what it wanted from the service (including working on prevention) and then ensure resources were put in place to deliver its programme.
- The local community were sympathetic to rough sleepers but did not want the resulting crime or anti-social behaviour they were connected with.
- The Homelessness Transformation work stream would be taking forward the recommendations proposed in the report (and were already working on some initiatives identified like the Personal Passport), and they very much saw the voluntary and community sector playing a vital role in the support and care being given to rough sleepers. Also this work would be pulled together as part of the Council's Homelessness Strategy. There was currently a service reorganisation going on for the Homelessness Transformation Team but it was expected that this would be completed by September.
- The conclusion from the thorough review that had been undertaken regarding all the policies and procedures that were in place for those services providing support for rough sleepers, was that that they were very comprehensive and fit for purpose but further work was needed regarding clarification on the enforcement and support roles being provided. Officers would now seek to develop a framework for intervention that would clarify this work.
- The preventative requirements the Council was being met through the work being done by its Routes off the Streets Team, with them providing advice, support and assistance (including where to get a hot meal and a shower) for those seeking support. This could also could include guidance on seeking

accommodation out of borough, as the Council did not have enough homes available to meet this need. Additionally, work was being developed around pathways out of homelessness, which was being made available for people awaiting Home Office decisions in Home Office accommodation. This provision included support and guidance on health, employment and housing.

- The current Council's service provision supporting this need had been set up when the number of rough sleepers and the people in temporary accommodation (300 more people now than two years ago) had been, but staffing support provision had matched this increased need. This had meant that officers had to look to see how further resources from elsewhere could be put into supporting this service.
- The Cabinet Member Safer Communities agreed to look into the interaction between a rough sleeper and Community Wardens outside St. Silas Church Hall.

ACTION BY: Cabinet Member Safer Communities

- Officers agreed to provide update reports regarding the implementation of the recommendations to the scrutiny committee at its October and January meetings.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing

The scrutiny committee welcomed the report and felt that the paper had the provided recommendations for action that now needed to be taken forward. They felt that to seek a delay to allow for further inclusions from other community and voluntary groups, would not add anything extra that had not already been established. They also felt that the report was an independent assessment of the issues and provided a clear way forward for the authority. They hoped that the new Government would better tackle the issue of homelessness, but it would be difficult to resolve until there were enough homes for people. The members also recognised that all appropriate groups would be involved in the relevant forums involved in delivering and monitoring service provision in this area.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted and the committee did not see the need for a further report to be undertaken on this issue as all aspects had been covered by the current report, and they also wished to see all relevant groups (including Streets Kitchens) play an active role in the appropriate forums set up to deliver the services supporting rough sleepers.

10. HOUSING OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL COMPLAINT HANDLING AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT AND COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE SELF-ASSESSMENT - LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN 2023-2024

Consideration was given to the report of the Borough Solicitor.

Jim Read, Service Manager, along with Kathryn Byrne, Head of Business Support, took the meeting through the report and they along with Scot Reid, Head of Property Customer Services & Engagement, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The Council had seen a sizeable increase in the number of complaints over the last two years with the majority of these being in housing repairs. This has led to an increase in the escalation of stage 1 complaints to stage 2 and from there to the Housing Ombudsman, which was not unique to Camden, with other social housing providers also seeing such increases. This was partly due to an increase in the awareness of the complaints process through the increased profile of the Housing Ombudsman. Also, the increase was due to greater investment being required in the Council's homes. Due to these reasons, it was expected that in future all stages of the complaints process were likely to see increases. Additional resources were being put in place to seek to improve the response process which it was hoped over time would reduce the number of the later stage complaints.
- The Council was putting in place processes and procedures to learn from the information coming out from the complaints it received. This information would be used to make service delivery improvements.
- The level of activity in the Repairs Service had greatly increased over the last few years due to the Council's proactive approach with work related to fire safety and damp and mould. This service was currently undertaking approximately over a hundred and fifty thousand interactions with tenants every year.
- Repairs matters were the second highest complaints issue that tenants were raising. This was partly due to the Council having to reaffirm what was a tenant's responsibility to deal with and what the Council would put right.
- The level of positive customer satisfaction with completed repairs was running at approximately 86% (this had been independently assessed) and this had remained stable over the last few years.
- Improving communications with tenants was an on-going theme arising out of the complaints that were being made, and this was something the Council was being proactive about in seeking to improve.
- The Council had put in place a resident led oversight panel that was looking at the themes that were arising from complaints raised, holding officers to account, along with seeking appropriate service improvements so the issues were not repeated.
- A number of service changes had been made to improve internal processes and procedures and it was hoped that these would make a real difference in the way complaints were dealt with, which would then lead to greater customer satisfaction at an earlier stage of the complaints process. It was hoped that this work could reduce the number of compensation settlements.
- Complaints generally increased over the winter months due to issues related to heating systems.

The scrutiny committee noted the difficult context housing services were having to work in due to the state of the Council's housing stock and the level of resources it had to deliver services, but felt that the high number of complaints at each stage of the process were a concern and wanted to see improvements to these statistics, especially around complaints handling going forward.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

11. INSIGHT, LEARNING AND IMPACT REPORT - QUARTER 4/END OF YEAR 2023-24

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Directors.

Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, took the meeting through the report and he along with Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, gave the following key responses to questions:

- Officers agreed to provide members with a copy of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures relating to fire safety when they were available this week.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (MD)

- A new development on Chester and Camden Road planned for 2025 would deliver a further 89 family size hostel units, which would enable the Council to better support its residents as and when necessary.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

12. RESPONSE TO THE HOMELESSNESS SCRUTINY PANEL REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Housing.

Simone Melia, Head of Housing Solutions, took the meeting through the report and gave the following key responses to questions:

- Officers would be providing the scrutiny committee with a further update report to its October meeting, and the paper would also provide an update on the Voluntary and Community Sector contracts and the out-of-hours provision.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing (SM)

- Officers would be progressing the recommendation regarding expanding outreach work at physical hubs once the service reorganisation had been completed and officer leads could be identified. This service reorganisation would also seek to change the way services were being provided to tenants in hostels and temporary accommodation.
- Officers would be considering how best to feedback to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) regarding where proposals for service change came from, along with whether there was scope to consider options to expand where the Council could commission the VCS to undertake aspects of the service instead of the local authority as they were better placed to deliver them.
- Officers would also be considering how best to recognise and promote the good work that was being done by all public agencies, including the Council.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

13. UPDATE FROM CABINET MEMBER FOR BETTER HOMES

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Member Better Homes

Councillor Sagal Abdi-Wali, Cabinet Member Better Homes, took the meeting through the report.

The scrutiny committee welcomed the report of the Cabinet Member Better Homes and the approaches she had identified in her report. The Members looked forward seeing further improvements to service provision regarding ASB, voids turnaround and delivery, support for private rented sector tenants, the management of new homes and helping all tenants in all types of tenures arising from new developments.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

14. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Property Management.

The scrutiny committee asked that the following matters be added to the provisional work programme, along with the further information required regarding items:

- Homelessness Scrutiny Panel recommendations update (October)
- Review of Rough Sleeping Services (October and January)

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Officers also agreed to provide all members of the scrutiny committee a copy of the proposed anti-social behaviour policy when available.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing

Programme of meetings 2024/25 (new items and information requests in bold)

7th October

- Leaseholder Services Update.
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures and Benchmarking
- Repairs and Operations & Capital Works Update (**also covering voids delivery programme**)
- Cabinet Member Better Homes Update
- Work programme
- **Homelessness Scrutiny Panel recommendations update**
- **Review of Rough Sleeping Services**

12th November

- Housing & Repairs Transformation Programme
- Landlord Services update on: Anti-social Behaviour Policy, Estate Parking Report, Feedback from Tenancy Visits, **and Voids lettings**
- Landlord Licensing Scheme (**also covering conditions of homes and enforcement action**)
- Cabinet Member Better Homes update
- Work Programme

10th December

- Asset Management Strategy (Cabinet Report)
- Allocations Policy Report
- HRA Budgeting Report
- Cabinet Member Better Homes update
- Work Programme

13th January 2025

- HRA Budget & Rent Review 24/25
- CIP annual report
- Domestic Abuse Report Update
- Cabinet Member Better Homes update
- Work Programme
- **Review of Rough Sleeping Services**

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25th February

- Housing Associations Annual Performance Report
- Cabinet Member Better Homes Annual Report
- Work programme

Yet to be programmed

RESOLVED –

THAT the report work programme be revised as outlined above.

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There were none.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END