

Cabinet member for Better Homes
Report to DMCs – Dec 2018
Updating and seeking your views

1. Chalcots review update

1.1. Since the Chalcots Review was published earlier this year the Council has been reviewing processes and procedures in response to the Review recommendations. To date we have:

- **established** a monthly partner meeting with the London Fire Brigade Borough Commander and his senior officers to discuss live case work, and developed a joint approach to with incidents and prevention and education programmes. The Borough Commander and his lead officers are also members of the Council's Fire Safety Advisory Panel established this year
- **reviewed** and refined our Emergency planning procedures should be kept under review to ensure that they are fit for purpose taking into consideration current best practice, guidance from central government and London Resilience and learning from responses to incidents. This is done in conjunction with the Borough Resilience Forum.
- **increased** the number of volunteers with the Crisis Support Team (Camden staff that volunteer for additional Emergency Planning & Business Continuity duties):
 - Local Authority Liaison Officers have increased from 10 to 16.
 - The number of Duty Emergency Planning Officers has increased from 5 to 10.
- **begun** working with the Camden Volunteer Centre on a central government sponsored pilot scheme to create a pool of organised local volunteers from the borough that could be used of a range of roles and activities.
- **held** emergency exercises involving senior management including:
 - Participation in Exercise Safer City (a pan London exercise)
 - A mass fatalities exercise
 - An excess deaths exercise
 - A pandemic flu exercise.

1.2. Our next steps are:

To recruit additional Crisis Support Team volunteers

- Rest Centre managers/officers
- Borough Emergency Control Centre operators

- 1.3. In the event of a Major Incident such as the evacuation in the Chalcots the Council has a small in-house security staff who can be deployed to provide immediate urgent assistance across Camden. The Council also has a security contractor with access to a wider network of staff that can be drawn on as necessary.
- 1.4. Where sub contracted Security is used, clear instructions are passed to these teams who are monitored to ensure that they carrying out their duties appropriately.
- 1.5. In the event of a Major incident, the Security Manager and Operations Manager set up meetings with Croma the Contract Manager to understand their deployment plans and agree how regular staff can be deployed to the more sensitive areas and deploy sub contracted labour to lower risk environments.
- 1.6. We continue to work on the recommendations of the review report and will be providing a progress report to Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet during the course of 2019.

2. Improving tenancy management

- 2.1 Previously officers and I reported that housing staff have been testing a new way of working in the Kentish Town/Highgate area. This supports us providing a service that helps residents have a secure, safe and affordable home and environment that meets their ongoing needs and provides them with help when they need it. The team has been testing a model in the Kentish Town area which involves providing a single trusted point of contact for residents, with staff developing the skills and knowledge to meet the predictable housing needs of our tenants, which can often be quite complex. This approach, which is about getting to the root causes of problems, has helped prevent problems from escalating and providing better outcomes for our residents and a more effective housing service.
- 2.2 We are consulting with staff on providing this new service borough wide. The proposal is that Neighbourhood teams replace existing Ward Housing teams, Rent teams and the Void Homes teams. In addition it is proposed that Floating Support Officers become part of the Neighbourhood teams. If agreed all the functions currently carried out by these separate services for council tenants will now be provided by the new post of Neighbourhood Officers. Staff consultation on the landlord redesign proposals started on the 29.10.18, staff views will be considered and a final structure agreed in January 2019 with borough wide implementation planned for June 2019.
- 2.3 My vision throughout has been to reduce patch sizes and take officers out in to the community where direct interaction with residents would hopefully prevent issues from festering. All this is subject to consultation and careful consideration

of the outcomes from this. At this stage it would be wrong of me to prejudge this process, so an update paper will be brought to the March 2019 DMCs, however your ongoing feedback now and until March 2019 would be invaluable.

3. Improving Estate Services Management

- 3.1 Estate Services are currently undertaking a review of the Caretaking service. This will provide the opportunity to formalise elements of how the existing role and services provided has grown over the last few years, whilst capturing resident feedback and additional service improvements as to how we can enhance a wider service offer to deliver the ambitions of the Camden Plan 2025. This particularly encompasses a variety of other measures namely in how we shape our service to support the Council's Fire Risk Assessment Programme and resident safety.
- 3.2 The review will be completed by the summer of 2019. As the external estate cleansing is one of the most common causes of complaint amongst residents and perhaps the most misunderstood, it has been decided to also incorporate this into the review. Currently the internal cleaning is the responsibility of the Caretaking service whilst the Council's contractor, Veolia, is responsible for the external cleaning of estates. The review will identify service opportunities via engagement with all key stakeholders, with residents being spoken to individually and directly or through their standing representative bodies and committees. The final proposals for the service will then need to be endorsed by the Council: through its normal decision making and approval process.
- 3.3 The manifesto commitment of the council administration is to bring the external estate cleansing contract in house, delivering this service under one umbrella and my stated aim is to implement the new caretaking service no later than 1 July 2018.

4. Improving conditions in the private rented sector and tackling empty private homes

- 4.1 One third of households in Camden live in the private rented sector, a proportion larger than both England (19%) and London (25%). In my previous reports I talked about how we are working to improve conditions in those homes through our Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing scheme. The scheme requires landlords of shared housing to obtain a licence from the council. The licence has conditions attached to it in relation to room size, fire safety and facilities.
- 4.2 In 2014/15 when we consulted on introducing licensing there was good support from DMCs because of the prevalence of renting in ex RTB properties and concerns about overcrowding, noise and health and safety in those properties.

- 4.3 Since the scheme went live in December 2015, 3,501 licence applications have been received of which 665 are for ex RTB properties. Inspectors are finding when visiting ex RTB homes for the purposes of licensing that there is poor subdivision of lounges creating under-sized rooms, a lack of wash hand basins in toilets and a lack of fire separation. By licensing these homes we are improving the living conditions of those renting privately on our estates and in our street properties.
- 4.4 We will shortly be consulting on extending the licensing scheme for another 5 years to enable us to licence more properties. We will come back to the DMCs for their views as part of that consultation.
- 4.5 Tackling rogue landlords who operate throughout the borough (including on our estates) is another priority. We are using new Civil Penalty Notice powers (available from April 2017) to fine landlords who breach the Housing Act 2004 and have issued 114 to date. We recently topped the Mayor's Rogue Landlord Database with 59 prosecutions. All income from Civil Penalty Notices can be retained by the Council to support further enforcement work.
- 4.6 There is also no hiding place for letting agents who don't display fees, or are not part of a redress scheme. Letting agents in the borough are being prosecuted and fined for such breaches.
- 4.7 In a borough of housing shortages, private sector empty homes are wasted assets. Owners of empty homes are routinely contacted and helped to bring their homes back into use. Grants are available to help landlords and when grants are given landlords must rent out their homes to homeless families that the Council is trying to find homes for. In the last five years the Council, working with owners has brought back into use 461 empty homes of which 72 have gone on to be used as homes for homeless families as a condition of grants given to an owner. We are disappointed that the Government has made it harder to secure Empty Dwelling Property Management Orders which now means that properties need to be empty for two years (as opposed to six months) and severely blighting the community before these Orders can be pursued.
- 4.8 A further area of concern is the energy efficiency of private rented homes. Due to the nature of the housing stock in Camden, excess cold can be an issue. From April 2018 landlords can no longer rent out homes which are F and G energy rated. A British Research Establishment stock modelling exercise in 2013 estimated there to be 8,777 (13%) of private dwellings to be within the F & G band.
- 4.9 Government has made available the data on which homes don't meet the F and G rating and we are using it to target homes that are in this category. As part of our licensing scheme we ask for an Energy Performance Certificate to check on ratings.

4.10 The private rented sector is housing a third of households and we will continue to make it our concern to improve the standards of those homes and to prosecute landlords who don't meet the necessary standards. Whilst at the same time engaging with and listening to landlords who are prepared to work with us to provide decent rented homes.

Meric Apak – November 2018