

## **THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN**

At a meeting of the **RESOURCES AND CORPORATE PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **MONDAY, 22ND JANUARY, 2024** at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

### **MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT**

Councillors Chung (Chair), Rebecca Filer, Edmund Frondigoun, Liam Martin-Lane, Jenny Mulholland, Jonathan Simpson and James Slater

### **MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT**

Councillor Andrew Parkinson

### **ALSO PRESENT**

Councillors Richard Olszewski

**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 Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.**

## **MINUTES**

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillors Jenny Mulholland.

### **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**

No declarations were made.

### **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. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)**

There were no deputations.

**5. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

There was no such business.

**6. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023 and the 19 December 2023 be agreed.

**7. LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2022/2023**

Consideration was given to the report of the Borough Solicitor. The report was introduced by the Service Manager, Business Support. The Head of Property Customer Services and Engagement and the Head of Neighbourhoods also gave introductions around their work areas.

In their discussion of the report the Committee made the following comments:

- Members noted the importance of good communication and the impact this could have on complaints. There was concern that poor communication was leading to an increase in complaints.
- In response to a question from Members, the Service Manager, Business Support said that housing associations were also held to the same standard by the Housing Ombudsman as Camden. Members suggested that knowledge and best practice be shared with Housing Associations, the Service Manager agreed to this.
- The Committee discussed the challenges they had met with when contacting Housing Associations, including unresponsiveness.
- A Member asked the Head of Property Customer Services and Engagement and the Head of Neighbourhoods whether there was anything Councillors could do to help with their work and the engagement of residents. The Head of Property Customer Services and Engagement said that it would be helpful

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for members to let residents know the many ways they could contact the Council around repairs and that they were particularly keen to hear from residents experiencing damp and mould. The Head of Neighbourhoods said it would be helpful if members encouraged people to seek a local solution when there had been failures in communication.

- Responding to a question from the Committee, the Head of Business Support clarified that members enquiries (MEs), freedom of information requests (FOIs) and complaints were all visible, internally, on the same system. This allowed officers within the relevant services to have an oversight of issues raised. Members welcomed this joined up approach internally and asked for a similar approach to complaints that extended to third parties if and when possible.
- The Service Manager, Business Support confirmed with the ME system, there was continued opportunity for Members to feed back on the usability of the system and that any feedback would be welcomed. Any feedback should be sent to him directly.
- Members discussed the increase in the number of complaints in relation to Housing Needs and asked whether staffing shortages could explain the change. The Head of Neighbourhoods said that some of the increase could be attributed to the shortages in housing officers, she commented that Camden needed to improve the handling of issues at a local level and ensuring that, when needed, the escalation of issues was clear and transparent for residents.
- The Service Manager, Business Support commented that there were a significant number of complaints withdrawn in relation to Housing, this was because residents mistakenly used the complaints form for service requests.
- In answer to a Member question about ME responses and the time this sometimes took, the Executive Director Corporate Services said that the Council Tax and Business Rates had seen an increase in correspondence from residents with an increase in complexity. He said that that this had been recognised and more resources in response.
- The Committee spoke about the housing contact pages on the website and noted that some of the pages were not working properly. The Head of Neighbourhoods agreed to take this issue away for a solution.

**Action by: the Head of Neighbourhoods**

- Members noted the importance of organisational learning from complaints and asked that clear examples of learning be included in future reports.
- The Service Manager, Business Support updated members on the Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments Working Group and said that information on it would be included in the next annual report.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT The report be noted.

## **8. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND COST OF LIVING**

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Cost of Living, who introduced the report.

In their discussion of the report, the Committee made the following comments:

- The Committee were interested in predicted overspend and the potential sources of it. The Cabinet Member said that there had been financial pressures from a number of areas including Adult Social Care and homelessness. Areas of overspend were anticipated as much as they could, the Medium Term Financial Strategy was framed to accommodate areas under financial pressure. The Cabinet Member noted that inflation had added to financial pressures.
- Members asked about financial crises experienced by other local authorities and whether a similar situation was on the horizon for Camden. In response to this, the Cabinet Member commented that Camden were not at risk of financial crisis, in part to the wariness of financial pressures and avoiding over-optimism with how situations would develop. The Executive Director Corporate Services commented that other authorities had taken on commercial risk to balance books and had a higher level of debt, whilst depleting reserves and that Camden had a good track record of savings delivery.
- Members discussed the lack of transparency and clarity with how central government fund local government.
- The Committee were pleased with the work around an inclusive evening and nighttime economy.
- Members asked for continued liaison with the local community around the Town Hall project. The Cabinet Member said that the Council and operators would maintain an open dialogue as the Town Hall project needed to be of benefit for the local community.
- Members were pleased with Camden's work around and continued steps to LGBT+ inclusion and equality. The Cabinet Member noted that Camden's procurement needed to be supportive of diverse communities and that it reflected national guidance.
- In response to a question from the Committee, the Cabinet Member commented that this was the 6<sup>th</sup> year in a row that Camden had received a 1-year financial settlement rather than a 3 year financial settlement from central government. The reduced financial certainty inhibited financial planning, making it more challenging to reform and innovate.

### **RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted.

**9. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24 AND ACTION TRACKER**

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the work programme be noted.

**10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

There was no such business.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.

**CHAIR**

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**MINUTES END**