

MINUTES

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COUNCIL OF THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN HELD AT COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HALL, JUDD STREET, LONDON WC1H 9JE AT 7.00 PM MONDAY, 14TH OCTOBER, 2024

MEMBERS PRESENT

The Mayor, Councillor Samata Khatoon (in the Chair), and Councillors;

Eddie Hanson	Sabrina Francis	Richard Olszewski
Sagal Abdi-Wali	Edmund Frondigoun	Andrew Parkinson
Steve Adams	Tommy Gale	Nazma Rahman
Nasim Ali OBE	Lorna Greenwood	Lorna Jane Russell
Meric Apak	Sharon Hardwick	Nadia Shah
Camron Aref-Adib	Adam Harrison	Tom Simon
Kemi Atolagbe	Nancy Jirira	Jonathan Simpson
Lotis Bautista	Heather Johnson	MBE
Marcus Boyland	Matthew Kirk	James Slater
Anna Burrage	Patricia Leman	Stephen Stark
Patricia Callaghan	Izzy Lenga	Robert Thompson
Linda Chung	Rishi Madlani	Shiva Tiwari
Matt Cooper	Liam Martin-Lane	Nanouche Umeadi
Richard Cotton	Sylvia McNamara	Anna Wright
Nasrine Djemai	Shah Miah	
Rebecca Filer	Awale Olad	

MEMBERS ABSENT

Councillors Ajok Athian, Joseph Ball, Nina De Ayala Parker, Judy Dixey, Julian Fulbrook, Jenny Headlam-Wells, Jenny Mulholland, Lorraine Revah and Sue Vincent

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 Council and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

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

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 no declarations.

3. SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE MAYOR, THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OR OTHER RELEVANT OFFICERS, AND ANY OTHER MEMBERS WHO THE MAYOR HAS AGREED MAY MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT

Broadcast of the meeting

The Mayor announced that the meeting was being broadcast to the internet and may be filmed by members of the press or public. Those speaking at the meeting were deemed to be agreeing to be recorded and broadcast.

By election results

The Chief Executive announced that, following the by-elections held on 5th September 2024, Patricia Leman was duly elected as ward councillor for Camden Square ward, Joseph Ball was duly elected as ward councillor for Kentish Town South ward and Robert Thompson was duly elected as ward councillor for Kilburn ward.

Mayoral Trip to Ireland

The Mayor reported on her recent trip to Dublin and remarked that she would shortly be sharing a summary of the highlights with all Members.

Withdrawal of Item 11

The Mayor reported that, in the light of Councillor Rahman's safe return to the country and her recent attendance at meetings, Item 11 on the agenda had been withdrawn by the Borough Solicitor.

Death of Honorary Alderman Roger Robinson

Councillors Cotton, Olszewski, Simon and Parkinson paid tribute to Alderman Roger Robinson, after which those present observed one minute's silence in his memory.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ball, De Ayala Parker, Dixey, Fulbrook, Headlam-Wells, Revah and Vincent.

5. DEPUTATIONS AND PETITIONS

A deputation was heard from Billy Byatt about traffic management in South End Green, as per the deputation statement published on the supplementary agenda.

Members then asked questions of the depute and the Cabinet Member for Planning and a Sustainable Camden responded to the deputation.

A deputation was then heard from Liz Wheatley of UNISON about bringing services in-house, as per the deputation statement published on the supplementary agenda.

Members then asked questions of the depute and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Cost of Living responded to the deputation.

The Mayor then thanked the deputees for their attendance.

At this point in the meeting, there was disruption from the public gallery and, following warnings from the Mayor communicated on her behalf by the Borough Solicitor, the meeting was adjourned at 7.50pm in order for the gallery to be cleared.

The meeting resumed at 8.11pm.

6. THEMED DEBATE - PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

Councillor Abdi-Wali introduced the report and the Council then heard from the following speakers:

Robert Taylor of the Camden Federation of Private Tenants spoke about the private rented sector being the most diverse housing tenure in the country and being where the poorest people and those most vulnerable to harm now lived. As a result of the current situation, the Federation was now providing a cost of living crisis fund even though it was not funded to do this type of work. He highlighted the differences between private tenants and council tenants, the primary one being that if a private tenant was experiencing problems with their landlord or home they did not tend to contact the Council and did not have a point of contact to direct them to services that could assist. He stressed the importance of the Council not telling private tenants that they were only able to help those in council homes. He felt that there was an urgent need for a new housing strategy, including a dedicated private rented sector strategy, and commented that the Renters Rights Bill would require some form of

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council enforcement and it was important for the resourcing of this to be properly understood. He concluded that in order for the Council's Estates and Neighbourhoods Mission to be successful it must involve private renters.

Gabriela Tocu of Citizens' Advice Camden remarked that housing was now the second biggest area of concern for the 10,000+ individuals and families that Citizens' Advice Camden assisted every year, the major issue being lack of affordability. There were very few properties within the price bracket of the local housing allowance and those that were tended to be too small or in a poor state of repair. People were unable to afford deposits or were having to choose between paying the rent and buying food. Others were rejected by landlords because they were in receipt of benefits or had a poor credit rating. People were signing tenancies without viewing properties and then finding that they were in a very poor state of repair. Tenants often did not speak to landlords about disrepair as they were afraid of being charged, having their rent raised or being evicted. Citizens' Advice saw many clients who were the victims of illegal evictions or harassment by landlords, many of whom were often not aware of their responsibilities to their tenants. There were frequent cases of landlords either not returning deposits or levying excessive charges for repairs. They were also seeing a lot of repossessions and were providing advice on eligibility for homelessness services.

Ben Reeve-Lewis of Safer Renting talked about the Renters Rights Bill and specifically the measures relating to enforcement and the risks and opportunities they presented. It would be the responsibility of local authorities to undertake this enforcement, but the government had made it clear that there would be no extra funding for this, so local authorities would need to think smarter. Camden was in a good position as it did chase down the money from awards, and the raft of new measures coming in would see the increased use of civil penalty notices, from which the money could then be used towards paying for enforcement. The bill would introduce the possibility of a £40k civil penalty notice for harassment and illegal eviction, which was enough to pay for one enforcement officer. Safer Renting dealt with between 300 and 400 cases of harassment or illegal eviction a year across 12 London boroughs and Camden was doing very good work in this field. He would however like to see the Council making use of rent repayment orders, which it did not currently use.

Matt Sudlow, a renter in Camden, spoke about his experience of renting in the borough and of the property he was living in being advertised at a rent of £700 a month more than he was paying, meaning that had to leave when his tenancy agreement ended. He spoke of then having no fixed address for 6 months, and sleeping on couches, floors and in bed & breakfasts. He related how his search for a property felt like a full time job and he was forced to look further and further away from university and his community. Agents encouraged potential tenants to get into competitive bidding wars for properties and sometimes asked for 6 months rent up front, guarantors with incomes well above the average, and the acceptance of precarious break clauses. In the end, he only found somewhere in Camden due to luck. Many people he knew who had lived in and loved Camden had been forced to leave due to high rents and housing instability.

Conor O'Shea of Generation Rent thanked the Council for having this important debate. Generation Rent had been set up 10 years ago because no one was talking about the issues experienced by renters in the private sector, so it was encouraging that they were now being talked about in the Council Chamber. He spoke of what the Council could do in the future with regards to helping renters to obtain rent repayment orders and identifying poor landlords. Energy efficiency was also a key issue – Awaab's Law would soon mean that people living in privately rented homes would have a clause in their contracts requiring landlords to act swiftly on reports of damp and mould in their properties. The Council could help facilitate this with an awareness campaign to draw attention to people's rights in this regard.

Members of the Council thanked the speakers for their contributions and commented and asked questions as follows:

- Did the Renters Rights Bill go far enough to tackle the loss of dignity that some in the private rented sector experienced when subjected to things like unannounced inspections by landlords? Was there more enforcement and education required?
- Many renters had no idea that the Council would get involved in relation to renters' rights. What more could be done to raise awareness of renters' rights and how the Council could help?
- What plans did the Council have for enforcement under the Renters Rights Bill once it became law?
- It was a matter of pride that the government was taking bold action in this area within its first 100 days in office.
- Some of the most concerning case work was in relation to Section 21 eviction notices, and banning Section 21 could not come soon enough.
- Tenants were threatened with reprisals if they complained about their property or requested repairs, and it was timely that this was being addressed.
- What was Camden doing to prepare for the Renters Rights Bill's provisions?
- A Member spoke of a rented flat he had lived in as a child being re-possessed after the landlord failed to pay the mortgage, and the feeling of insecurity and loss of dignity that this provoked. He added that his experience of a local councillor advocating for his family on their disrepair situation had led to him becoming involved in politics.
- People had to pay huge amounts in rent and deposit in order to stay in the borough.
- Lots of renters did not understand their rights and the Cabinet Member for Better Homes and the Associate Cabinet Member for Leaseholders would be working on this over the next year.
- Last week there had been a meeting in Belsize on just these issues and councillors were encouraged to hold similar meetings in their wards.
- Demand outstripped supply massively in Camden which made enforcement vital, and the Council was doing good work within its existing powers, but there was an assumption made by most people that the Council was only there to assist with social housing, and this assumption was reinforced when they

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looked at the Council's website or spoke to officers. The Council needed to change its language and make the private rented sector more prominent in its public facing material.

- A Member spoke of paying a deposit to secure a property that she had not seen. She also spoke of having to spend hours trying to get repairs done, time that many people did not have, and of the knowledge that was needed, and that most people did not have, in order to get things done.
- Within the 36% of people who rented homes, what proportion experienced the problems that had been related this evening?
- What experience did the speakers have of housing associations as landlords?
- A Member spoke of a case where someone had moved into a flat without realising there was an existing tenant who was sub-letting to them, and were then evicted as the original tenant was not paying rent. Action on Fraud had then refused to take the case up and they were left out of pocket.
- What advice did the speakers have to assist members in dealing with case work more effectively?
- The health impacts of poor housing were wider than just the physical, but also impacted people's mental health, and vulnerable residents in the private rented sector were often disconnected from support and community services and likely to suffer from loneliness and social isolation. Did the speakers have suggestions on how more could be done to address this?
- What part of the Renters Rights Bill would make most difference to renters?
- Many renters wanted to escape the private rented sector and own their own homes, so helping to deliver a supply of new housing was key.
- Camden was one of the few boroughs that still had a federation of private tenants, but other support systems had disappeared and there was more that could be done.
- The Bill was excellent but if there were any loopholes then landlords would use them, so the detail was extremely important.
- The private rented sector did not provide decent long term housing.
- What could the Council do with regard to funding organisations supporting renters in the private sector?
- The private rented sector was disfiguring the community in some areas of the borough by undermining mixed tenure. Many properties had been divided into flats, and landlords would not accept tenants in receipt of benefits, meaning that some areas of the borough were no longer places where people could afford to raise a family. What was the Cabinet Member doing to help address these issues and maintain mixed communities?
- Renters sometimes did not go to landlords about issues within their homes.
- The language used in discussing the private rented sector was problematic - these places were in fact people's homes and should be long term and stable bases for the people renting them. There was a tension between landlords running their properties as businesses and those properties being seen as homes.
- Where did the Renters Rights Bill not go far enough?

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In response to Members' questions and comments, speakers made the following remarks:-

Robert Taylor commented that funding from the local authority to the Federation of Private Tenants had remained the same for 10 years and the organisation was accruing a deficit year on year. Without increased funding it was facing serious financial trouble. There was not enough money to organise meetings with renters across all the wards in Camden and the Federation had been in touch with some councillors about assisting with this. On the subject of housing associations, local authorities did not currently have the power to hold them to account. The Federation did engage with and hold meetings with them, but it was difficult to hold them accountable.

Ben Reeve-Lewis suggested that Members who were approached by a renter having issues with a landlord should firstly speak to the licensing and enforcement team who might well be aware of the landlord or agent concerned. They could also contact Safer Renting, who would often know the parties concerned, and the Greater London Authority also had a 'report a rogue landlord' function on its website. A 2018 report on the legal rights of renters had found that around 46% of people did not know that a problem with their private landlord was in fact a legal problem. Safer Renting had produced a report in 2021 about people becoming stuck in the private rented sector and a report by Dr Stephen Battersby had found that there were only 2.4 environmental health officers for every 10,000 private rented properties in London. The Renters Reform Bill might assist in addressing the balance between landlord and tenant, but it would not happen overnight.

Conor O'Shea remarked that a key issue was how to make sure that people knew their rights and this was something that Generation Rent had been struggling with for many years. The Federation did amazing work and should be properly resourced. It was also important to do targeted advertising on line as this was effective when done properly, and getting the information out in as many of the languages spoken within the community as possible also made an impact. In response to the question about how big a problem bad landlords were, there was no disputing that there were plenty of good landlords, but it was a lottery, and people entering into an arrangement had no idea if their landlord was going to be responsible or not. In theory renters could be the envy of homeowners, but this was currently just not the situation.

Gabriela Tocu agreed that not all landlords were bad, but some were just not aware of their responsibilities and tenants were not aware of their rights. There were simple things that could be done to help with this, such as sending leaflets by post and holding 'know your rights' sessions. She was grateful for the cost of living fund and the discretionary housing fund, but these were small pots of money, so more funding there would be very useful.

Matt Sudlow spoke of the uneven power dynamic between renters and landlords, driven by the intense demand for housing. It was good to see the government delivering rights to renters and the Renters Rights Bill was very promising, particularly in regards to ending rental bidding, stronger protections against back

door evictions and the ability to appeal against above market rents. The introduction of an ombudsman gave renters hope but would count for little if landlords were unaware of their responsibilities and tenants were unaware of their rights, and that was something that the Council and other agencies could assist with.

In response to some of the questions and comments, Councillor Abdi-Wali made the following remarks:-

- Supporting the Federation of Private Tenants was important as they did excellent work. There were a number of ways that the Council could support them and she looked forward to continuing those conversations.
- A lot of work had been done to improve the Council's website in relation to private renters and it did now direct people to the 'support for private renters' pages which gave useful information and contacts.
- The Council was doing a lot of good work in this area but there was of course always more that could be done.
- The Council was leading in terms of enforcement and worked closely with Safer Renting to identify rogue landlords and hold them to account, and the opportunity presented by the new legislation to impose civil penalty notices would hopefully mean that income from fines could be reinvested in enforcement.
- The creation of a national landlord database would make it easier to identify rogue landlords and would remove some of the administrative inefficiencies in the system.
- The Council was already working on an action plan for the private rented sector and was aiming to reach out to Camden residents in the sector, as it had done to Council tenants.

She concluded by thanking the speakers for giving up their time to take part in the debate.

The Mayor also thanked the speakers for attending.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

7. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER AND CABINET MEMBERS

Councillor Richard Olszewski, Leader of the Council, made a statement to those present. Councillor Tom Simon, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, and then Councillor Steve Adams, Leader of the Conservative Group, made statement in response and Councillor Olszewski then made some final remarks.

The Leader and Cabinet Members then took questions from Members as follows:-

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- Councillor Simon asked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Cost of Living what impact he thought the two child benefit cap would have on families in Camden. Councillor Aref-Adib remarked that the level of child poverty was appalling and 287 households were impacted by the two child cap in Camden. It was important to think about the welfare system holistically and it was difficult to assess the impact of the two child limit without reform to the benefits cap, but it would take time for the new government to tackle these issues. In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member stated that he would not comment on whether he would support a motion to call on the government to lift the two child cap, but he acknowledged the challenge of rising poverty rates and observed that there were difficult decisions to be made. Locally, the Council had awarded over 1500 discretionary payments to households with 3 or more children and it would continue to support larger families.
- Councillor Gale asked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Cost of Living about the steps being taken to increase to uptake of pension credit in Camden. Councillor Aref-Adib responded that the take up rate in Camden was above the national average and there had been a lot of work done on this in recent years, but there remained 400 eligible residents who were not claiming. In collaboration with Age UK, letters were going out to those people and the money advice team would also be making targeted calls. In response to a supplementary question about work with younger residents, he remarked that the Council continued to invest in one of the most generous cost of living funds in London and had one of the most generous council tax reduction schemes in the country. He was also pleased that the household support fund had been extended to the end of the year, enabling the Council to continue to support the most vulnerable residents.
- Councillor McNamara asked the Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families about what steps were being taken to reduce the current autism diagnosis waiting time of 86 weeks and how parents were being supported while they waited. Councillor Boyland thanked Councillor McNamara and her colleagues for their report on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision. He recognised the pressures on the system and he shared the concern about the long waiting times. There had been recent work on reducing waiting times, including through the SEND inclusion board, and concerns had been formally raised with North Central London Integrated Commissioning Board who were working on establishing a standardised pathway. Camden was also working on ways to reduce waiting times, including through its CAMHS work with the Tavistock Centre and its new SEND website, though there was much left to do. In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Boyland commented that he had regular focus groups and meetings with parents, but it was impossible to say how long it would take to bring waiting times down to a more reasonable level.

THE MAYOR IN THE CHAIR.

At this point in the meeting, the Council agreed to extend the meeting by up to 10 minutes in order to complete the essential business.

8. BUSINESS FROM THE ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING OF 22ND JULY 2024

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Solicitor.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

9. APPOINTMENTS TO FORMAL COUNCIL BODIES

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Solicitor.

In relation to the nominations relating to the Planning Committee set out at paragraph 1.15 of the report, Councillor Gale proposed an amendment, with Councillor Djemai remaining on the Committee and Councillor Abdi-Wali stepping down instead.

RESOLVED –

- (i) THAT Councillor Leman be appointed to replace Councillor Tiwari on the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee;
- (ii) THAT Councillor Tiwari be appointed to the Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee to fill the vacancy left by Councillor Aref-Adib's appointment to Cabinet and that Councillor Thompson be appointed as a substitute member of the committee;
- (ii) THAT Councillors Leman and Ball be appointed as substitute members of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee;
- (iii) THAT Councillor Ball be appointed to the Housing Scrutiny Committee to fill the vacancy left by Councillor Djemai's appointment to the Cabinet and that Councillor Rahman be appointed as a substitute member of the committee;
- (iv) THAT Councillor Thompson be appointed to replace Councillor Slater on the Resources and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee;
- (v) THAT Councillor Thompson be appointed to fill the vacancy for a substitute member on the North Central London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee;

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- (vi) THAT Councillor Slater be appointed to replace Councillor Aref-Adib on the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee;
- (vii) THAT Councillor Leman be appointed to replace Councillor Greenwood on the Audit and Corporate Governance (Accessible Transport Appeals) Panel;
- (viii) THAT Councillor Lenga be appointed as a substitute member on the Audit and Corporate Governance (Staff Appeals) Sub-Committee;
- (ix) THAT Councillor Aref-Adib be appointed to fill the vacancy on the Audit and Corporate Governance (Performance Review) Sub-Committee;
- (x) THAT Councillor Leman be appointed to fill the vacancy on the Audit and Corporate Governance (Statutory Officers' Appeal) Sub-Committee;
- (xi) THAT Councillor Lenga be appointed to fill the vacancy on the Audit and Corporate Governance (Executive Directors' Appeal) Sub-Committee;
- (xii) THAT Councillors Leman, Thompson and Ball be appointed to fill the vacancies on the Audit and Corporate Governance (Appointments Panel) Sub-Committee;
- (xiii) THAT Councillor Hanson be appointed as a substitute member on the Pension Committee;
- (xiv) THAT Councillors Hanson, Harrison and Thompson be appointed to the Planning Committee to replace Councillor Abdi-Wali and fill the two vacancies;
- (xv) THAT Councillors Ball and Leman be appointed to replace Councillors Hanson and Olszewski on the Licensing Committee and that Councillor Ball be appointed to fill the resulting vacancy on Licensing Panel D and Councillor Leman be appointed to fill the resulting vacancy on Licensing Panel E;
- (xvi) THAT Councillor Filer be appointed to replace Councillor Lenga on the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education; and
- (xvii) THAT Councillor Aref-Adib be appointed to replace Councillor Olszewski on the Pension Board.

10. ITEMS EXEMPTED FROM CALL IN ON GROUNDS OF URGENCY

Consideration was given to a report of the Borough Solicitor.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

11. WAIVER OF SIX MONTH COUNCILLOR ATTENDANCE RULE

This report was withdrawn from the agenda.

12. REPORTS FROM THE CABINET, THE AUDIT AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE, THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES AND OTHER COUNCIL COMMITTEES

12(a) TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT AND MID-YEAR STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director Corporate Services on the main agenda and to a reference from the Cabinet contained on the supplementary agenda, which were introduced by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Cost of Living.

Following comments and questions from Members and a summing up from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Cost of Living, it was

RESOLVED –

THAT the Treasury Management Annual Report (paragraphs 3.3 to 3.18 of the report) and the Mid-Year Strategy (paragraphs 3.19 to 3.46 of the report) be approved.

12(b) UPDATE TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE

Consideration was given to a report of the Executive Director Adults and Health and a reference from the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee, which were introduced by the Chair of the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.

RESOLVED –

THAT the changes to the terms of reference of the Health and Wellbeing Board set out in paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2 of the report be agreed.

13. CARERS ACTION PLAN - FOLLOW UP REPORT TO JULY THEMED DEBATE

Consideration was given to a report of the Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care.

Following a comment from a Member, it was

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

14. MOTIONS

This item was not considered due to lack of time.

15. OPEN SESSION

This item was not considered due to lack of time.

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE MAYOR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no urgent business.

Having adjourned between 7.50pm and 8.11pm, and having extended the meeting at 10.00pm, the meeting ended at 10.09 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END