

Deputation regarding item 6 on the Council agenda -
Reference from the Housing Scrutiny Committee - Building Safety Act & New
Regulatory Standards

This deputation is from the Chairs of the District Management Committees. We are grateful to the members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee for raising the issue of the state of Camden's housing stock. Given the timetable we have not been able to consult our members before this deputation, and so set out views we expect they would want us to represent on their behalf.

It was Margaret Thatcher who cut government subsidies for building homes in favour of subsidising rents. I moved into my flat shortly after to find the building needed repairs and redecorations.

At no stage since then has Camden had sufficient funding to reach a stable situation where the housing stock could be said to be safe, warm, dry and in benefitting from timely repairs and redecoration to keep it so. We await the analysis of the findings of the latest stock condition survey; we were told that Camden was short of some £180m to implement the findings of the last one.

In 2012, housing subsidy was ended, and Camden received £46m in compensation calculated on the basis of projected rent increases which were then cut by the Lib Dem/Tory coalition government leaving an ongoing Housing Revenue Account deficit currently standing at £125m. Planned maintenance and repairs were cut, contributing to current damp and mould problems costing £40m to date. Responses to increasingly tighter fire risk requirements recognised after the Grenfell fire have cost £200m so far and rising with no extra funding to cover it.

So, we can only speculate how short funding to tackle the results of the new stock condition survey will be. But, 'muddling through' is unlikely to work given ongoing government pressure to address the latest public scandal, meaning a disjointed approach imposing unfunded burdens without any coherent phasing allowing proper programme planning.

Michael Scorer left Camden to become Executive Director for Housing in Southwark with the largest council housing stock in London. He recently gave evidence to the Housing select committee very similar to this far briefer account before he resigned and outlined areas where Southwark has no funding for what it wants and needs to do.

You will doubtless have some political knockabout. We hope for a serious debate about the impossible situation facing all council landlords who have tried to live within government funding limits, particularly since coalition government cuts, whether intentional to manage economic problems or because of unexpected events for which no provision has been made.

Your debate could prepare the way for a proper public discussion of the new Camden stock condition survey results and how to respond to them. If it does, Scrutiny will have done a good job even if that debate is not welcomed by whoever is in government after 2024.

Peter Wright, Chair of Holborn District Management Committee (DMC), attending with Fran Herron, Chair of Camden Town DMC and Derek Jarman, Chair of Kentish Town DMC.