

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **MONDAY, 18TH DECEMBER, 2023** at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Kemi Atolagbe (Chair), Sagal Abdi-Wali, Richard Cotton, Tommy Gale, Eddie Hanson, Nancy Jirira and Bev Chambers (co-opted member)

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Nasrine Djemai, Samata Khatoon and Victor Seedman (co-opted member)

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Pat Callaghan, Acting Leader (item 7)
Councillor Meric Apak, 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 Councillors Nasrine Djemai and Samata Khatoon and Vic Seedman (Co-opted Member).

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 14th November 2023.

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 14th November 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

6. DEPUTATIONS

There were none.

7. INVESTIGATION REPORT INTO INCIDENT ON HUNTLEY STREET ON 10TH DECEMBER 2023

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director Supporting Communities.

Councillor Pat Callaghan, Acting Leader, and Gillian Marston, Executive Director Supporting Communities, took the meeting through the report and they along with Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The Council recognised that the previous good work and trust that had been put in place regarding the way the Council had worked with rough sleepers had been undermined by the actions on 10th November. The Council would be seeking to re-establish this trust and good working relationships by putting in place a protocol for working with other partners, particularly the police and how officers should escalate things up to senior officers. This work would be shaped by the review of the whole rough sleeper service that was being led by the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Public Health, along with re-establishing the Homelessness Partnership Forum that would be chaired

by the Cabinet Member for Community Safety. The review would be looking at the decision-making and escalation process and lessons learnt from the incident, to see what changes would need to be put in place to ensure that such an incident did not happen again. The review would also look into the roles the respective teams should play in future should such action be required again along with the communications around the Council's role.

- The Council had initially responded to the incident on Huntley Street based on the coverage that was being shown on social media, but without seeking the full facts. Once the position regarding the Council's involvement was clear then the Council put out a revised statement accepting its role in the incident and apologising for the role it played.
- The investigation into the Council's role in the incident made it clear that though junior officers in different services were aware of and involved in responding to the proposed dispersal order at Huntley Street, senior officers took full responsibility for the incident. This was because there should have been a stronger framework in place for escalation and decision-making. Having a clear framework in place would have ensured an awareness of the need to escalate to senior officers and appropriate councillors when such work was being undertaken.
- The Council recognised that the current approach to the gathering of data in relation to rough sleepers was flawed, but it was required to follow existing government methodology so as to allow a national picture to be established.
- Officers would provide further information in relation to the Council's own picture of the number of rough sleepers and specifically the number of women identified.

**ACTION BY: Executive Director
Supporting Communities**

- After the incident on 10 November, the Leader (temporarily returning from maternity leave), the acting Leader, the Chief Executive, the Executive Director Adults and Health, and the Director of Housing, attended a community meeting convened by the Camden New Journal and Streets Kitchen (organised before the incident) to explain the Council's role, apologise and hear from people directly affected by the dispersal and homelessness in Camden more widely.
- Senior officers met with the staff across the service to make it absolutely clear that this was not a junior staff issue, and that senior officers took responsibility for what happened.
- Council officers often worked closely with the Police on anti-social behaviour and it had a hot hotspot team that went out with them when necessary. The Council also worked closely with its voluntary sector partners and these close relationships were working well and would remain in place going forward.
- Routes-off-the-Streets was an overall strategy, which was a support package that was being delivered by Change Grow Live who were the company that was commissioned to undertake this work.

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- The Routes-off-the-Streets Team were not there on the day of the eviction because officers didn't want to confuse the support role with the enforcement role. The Routes-off-the-Street Team had though, met those individuals on that site before the eviction happened to try and give them the support they needed. This meeting had identified that they had a range of highly complex non-housing needs based around mental health and drugs. In terms of the eight people that were moved from the Huntley Street a lot of work had been done to try and support them with five people now being booked into accommodation, one offered, but refused that accommodation, and two have not been heard from since.
- The Council was having to work in a very challenging environment with a lack of financial resources, not enough facilities available to offer rough sleepers, Home Office processes and procedures and Camden being an attractive place for people to venture towards due to it being a major transport hub. The Council though would continue working with all the appropriate agencies and support networks to help as many rough sleepers as it could in a humanitarian way. This message had also been relayed to the appropriate agencies at a senior level.
- Senior officers were aware that it was a very difficult area to work in now because it was so stressful and they were particularly concerned about staff working in the rough sleeping service. This was especially the case during this incident, which was why senior officers had met with the staff to ensure that they were being supported. In addition to that, officers had called in the psychologically informed caseworker team who look at psychologically informed trauma, to help inform service delivery and they would also be working with homelessness services staff, who had seen an increase in more demanding and challenging cases due to the increase in the vulnerabilities of those living rough on the streets.
- The Council had a rough sleeping Commissioner who met with Change Grow Live on a weekly and monthly basis where they go through established key performance indicators, which would be shared with the committee.

ACTION BY: Executive Director Supporting Communities

- The review would also look at whether those KPI were the right ones, whether they were being monitoring in the right way, along with how Homelessness Partnership Forum could oversee that service.
- Officers would provide a briefing note regarding the way the Homelessness Partnership Forum would be taken forward. This would include the proposed terms of reference, membership (including a place for the Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Committee) and operating arrangements. Also a report would be provided to the scrutiny committee in six-months regarding the progress to date, and a further report would be provided following the review of the Rough Sleeping Services being undertaken by the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Public Health to consider the proposed outcomes.

**ACTION BY: Executive Director
Supporting Communities**

The scrutiny committee recognised the wider national context the lack of resources, and the Government's actions were having on the Council's ability to support and deal with the number of rough sleepers there were in the borough.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET REPORT

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

Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, took the meeting through the report and gave the following key responses to questions:

- Officers would provide a briefing note regarding whether tenants could be offered a pay as you go option when an individual heating system had been installed into a home, or customise existing heating system to allow for this.

**ACTION BY: Director of Property
Management (SA)**

- Information would be provided to a future meeting regarding the position on rent arrears, but currently the Council had seen a small reduction on the level of arrears for the second month running.
- The Council would be considering the results of the current stock conditions survey next year and this would be used to determine the way the capital programme should be shaped, with this time more emphasis on a targeted response to enable in-year pressures to be dealt with and preventative work, which in-turn would ease the pressure on the repairs budget. This though would be effected by the levels of resources available to fund such works.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

**9. HOUSING UPDATE: ALLOCATIONS, SHELTERED HOUSING AND
ROUGH SLEEPING SERVICES**

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

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Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, took the meeting through the report and she along with Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, Gerry Crowley, Head of Allocations, Lettings and Private Housing Services, Maria Jacobs, Head of neighbourhoods, and Simone Melia, Head of Housing Solutions, Katie Hawthorn, Strategic Lead, gave the following key responses to questions:

- Officers would provide feedback to members of the scrutiny committee regarding the current vacancy rate in the Council's sheltered housing schemes, and if available with comparative data from other registered providers of sheltered housing.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing

- The Council was aware of the current vacancy rate in its sheltered housing stock and was looking at reviewing and re-branding its Sheltered Housing offer so that it was modernised, fit for purpose, changed the perception of the service offer and make it an attractive option. Dedicated officers were in place that were seeking to help match the person applying with the right home for them. The proposed changes would look at re-naming the service, lowering the age range of those applicable, and linking into the allocations scheme to provide an offer that could encourage people to downsize and free up more expensive to run family size homes. Also housing officers had been working on projects with adult social care about intergenerational opportunities. This would also include looking at the Council's retirement living schemes for people with learning disabilities, and it had another project going on at the moment as well to look at expanding that.
- The Council was reviewing its allocations policy and procedures to seek to ensure that they were more transparent, easy to use for councillors, tenants and staff, ensured that clarity of decision-making was provided, and would be people centred. Once the changes had been agreed there would be a communications campaign to highlight the changes so that the changes were widely shared and understood in the local community. The current demand for homes greatly outstripped the supply available with over 7,000 people on the waiting list and last year only 800 homes were made available. This was not going to change in the near future, meaning that difficult decisions had to be made to ensure those with the greatest housing need were prioritised for rehousing.
- The Council sought to ensure that it invested in its housing stock and when necessary update its heating systems on estates. When looking at replacing the heating system for an estate, the council would consider the range of options available to it based on the resources available and seek to ensure the best approach for the tenant/resident and the Council. Communal heating networks would still be part of the solutions available for consideration, though the energy being provided could come from communal heat pumps or different renewable energy sources in the future.
- The Council recognised that sometimes that tenants and residents were not kept updated when things were happening on their estates and were seeking

to improve this process through the use of social media, its websites and the resident liaison operatives on-site as part of big housing work schemes.

- The Council had a housing first program in Camden, which was essentially a concept where instead of placing single people into hostels, which works really well for some people, they were placed into private rented sector units (currently 70 along with housing association units). This was being used as there was a recognition that for some people with the most entrenched needs and people with multiple disadvantages, hostels may not be the best place for them to go and giving them a fresh start, giving them a tenancy and putting the support round them could be a better way for those people to move on with their lives. This was a widely used approach. The Council was also looking to build on its housing first provision and has put in place a bid to create 35 new housing first units and those would be for single people.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

10. CAMDEN CAPITAL WORKS FRAMEWORK PROCUREMENT

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

Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, took the meeting through the report and he along with Susanne Afra, Head of Capital Works, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The Council had learned a number of lessons from the existing procurement framework that it had now put in place in the proposed new arrangements. This should help in relation to market volatility, value for money, better social value requirements, and improved contract delivery. One of the changes to the framework, related to the greater use of small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) to deliver more of the works. As part of its seeking to make the framework work better, the Council had sought to test the use of SMEs to deliver works outside of the existing framework arrangements, and due to the success of this approach the Council had encouraged these SMEs to bid to be part of the new framework arrangements.
- The new framework would have in place an updated set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that would enable the authority to better hold the contractors to account. In future should a contractor not meet the required KPIs then they could be rested from the framework for a period of time during which they would not be able to bid for any work.
- The framework would ensure that appropriate guarantees and warranties were in place with contractors. Contractors would not be paid the full amount unless they provided all of the relevant paperwork.
- Leaseholders would be formally consulted when the framework was put together. Once observations had been received and considered, then the

tenders would be pulled together. Leaseholders would again then be consulted before the framework contract was awarded, and be advised of the contractors and how the process would work.

- Officers would provide a briefing note regarding the role DMC representatives, TRAs and residents generally could play in the tender evaluation and specific work schemes.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (SA)

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

11. FIRE SAFETY ACTIONS UPDATE

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

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

- The Council was working through the regulatory notice action plan that had been agreed with the Housing Regulator as set out in the appendix to the report. The Council was making steady progress in reducing the number of overall overdue repairs actions and it was hoped that the overall numbers would reduce by springtime next year, though it should be noted that it was possible that new actions could then become overdue which in-turn would impact on the overall figure.
- Officers would ensure that the monthly update would identify the new actions coming in separately from the existing actions. Along with providing the trends as a graph.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (HAF)

- Officers would also provide an update regarding the BS9997 audit when available in the spring next year.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (HAF)

RESOLVED -

THAT the report be noted along with the proposal that:

- (i) Future monthly reports on FRA actions would be issued as a memorandum to members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee and the Housing & Fire Advisory report; and
- (ii) The monthly updates would be posted on the Council's website

12. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

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

The meeting was advised that the work programme should be revised to add for the February meeting a report on the new procedure for Neighbourhoods re housing & domestic abuse. Also the report on Tenants Satisfaction should contain information regarding the performance of Housing Repairs Call Centre and the review of Rough Sleeping Service would be added to the work programme.

Programme of meetings (new items in bold)

JANUARY 2024

- HRA rent setting (Cabinet report)
- Tenancy arrears and rent collection
- Cost of Living update
- Ombudsman Report
- Work programme

FEBRUARY 2024

- CIP annual report
- Report of Cabinet Adviser: Leaseholder billing and service charges
- Homelessness Scrutiny Panel (provisional date)
- **New procedure for Neighbourhoods regarding housing and domestic abuse**
- Cabinet Member Better Homes annual report
- Work programme

Yet to be programmed

- Tenants Satisfaction Regulatory Survey (including the operation of the Housing Repairs Call Centre), when it was available.
- Update reports regarding the Cabinet Adviser reports on Supporting Rough Sleepers, Estates Mission and Tenants Participation.
- **Review of the Rough Sleeping Service**

RESOLVED –

THAT the report work programme be revised as outlined above.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There were none.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END