

## **THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN**

At a meeting of the **HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **THURSDAY, 22ND FEBRUARY, 2024** 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 Samata Khatoun

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

Councillor Nasrine Djemai, and Bev Chambers and Victor Seedman (co-opted members)

### **ALSO PRESENT**

Councillor Meric Apak, Cabinet Member Better Homes  
Councillor Danny Beales, Cabinet Member for New Homes, Jobs and Community Investment (item 7)  
Councillors Awale Olad and Nanouche Umeadi (item 10)

**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 Councillor Nasrine Djemai, Vic Seedman and Bev Chamber Co-opted Members.

### **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 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024.

### **RESOLVED –**

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

## **6. DEPUTATIONS**

A deputation was received from Andrew Dow, West Kentish Town Estate (WKTE) TRA, in relation to the WKT estate regeneration as set out in the supplementary agenda.

Andrew Dow then gave the following key responses to questions:

- The deputation felt that the proposals were very different to what had originally been proposed by the Council for the estate. People living on the estate were not aware of the changes to the design that had taken place, the deputees as part of their door-knocking exercise, had to advise tenants of the changes, and they felt money had been wasted in relation to the consultation process
- They felt that the green spaces would disappear and be replaced by high-rise buildings that would be damp and gloomy places with no real outside space.

The Chair then thanked Andrew Dow for making the deputation

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A deputation was then received from Paul Tomlinson in relation to boosting training as set out in the supplementary agenda.

Paul Tomlinson and Jason Mason then gave the following key responses to questions:

- The stock conditions survey would provide the Council with valuable information regarding the state of its homes and the work that would needed to be undertaken.
- The Council had previously had a scrutiny panel on the repairs service and the scrutiny committee could consider setting up another one, using the previous panel's recommendations as a basis for their inquiry.
- The Council should work with the trade unions to seek to ensure service delivery and training for current and future employees was delivered to a high quality standard. This could include the consideration of establishing a direct labour organisation, which could use the construction centre to help train people and increase the number of apprentices trained in the skills needed.
- The deputation felt that the quality of the work being delivered by the repairs service had regressed at a time when housing rents, along with its Council Tax, were increasing.

The Chair then thanked Paul Tomlinson and Jason Mason for making the deputation

A deputation was also received from Carolyn Morgan, (Leaseholders Forum) in relation to the Cabinet Adviser's report on Leaseholder Services as set out in the supplementary agenda.

The Chair then thanked Carolyn Morgan for making the deputation.

## **7. CIP ANNUAL REPORT**

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

Councillor Danny Beales, Cabinet Member New Homes, Jobs and Community Investment, took the meeting through the report and he along with Neil Vokes, Director of Development, gave the following key responses to questions:

- Over 90% of residents on the West Kentish Town Estate had voted in favour of the proposed regeneration scheme, which was one of the biggest votes in favour in London. Tenants on the estate wanted the Council to move faster regarding its regeneration, but following community views expressed (e.g. not wishing to live in taller buildings and the trade-off's around that) the Council had wanted to take time to ensure that the plans worked to deliver the best possible scheme available.

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- Officers supporting the regeneration initiative on the estate were consistently consulting with tenants and residents regarding the design for the estate.
- The people who made a deputation to the scrutiny committee were not recognised by the Council as the formal tenants and residents association representing all those living on the estate, as they had not held a formal AGM to have themselves constituted as such. Though the Council worked with all tenants and residents on the estate including those that attended the scrutiny committee.
- The majority of tenants living on the West Kentish Town Estate did not have access to green space. It was also an estate with endemic damp and mould problems where a number of tenants were living in overcrowded conditions.
- The original design document had clearly outlined that it was proposed that over 800 spacious and modern newly built homes would be delivered, where there were currently 316 existing homes. This significant uplift in the number of homes was due to the need have private homes part of the scheme, as they were the means to fund the new and improved Council homes. There was never a proposal that the scheme would only have 4 or 5 storey housing.
- Resources had been spent to-date to cover the many years of extensive consultation and engagement along with of an independently administered ballot process. Also a range of consultants were needed to help devise and deliver the incredibly complex planning application that sought to deliver the development. Further, the resources had been used in the early buybacks of homes from leaseholders to enable the initial phases to start, along with starting the onsite preparations for the demolition of the garages which was part of the first phase of the scheme. The development programme could not be delivered on a shoestring budget nor should it be, because it was important to recognise that in order for people to live in a quality home they needed the appropriate technical expertise who would consult with residents over a prolonged period of time, and this needed to be properly resourced. These resources had been allocated to the scheme and were not new commitments.
- The Council had conducted a survey of residents about their experience after moving into a new home provided through the estate regeneration programme. The responses and feedback from residents was that these homes were of a very high quality, had very good energy performance, lower bills, and were a significant improvement on their previous housing conditions.
- There have been a BBC article about a scheme in Agar Grove and there seemed to be some confusion between the Council scheme and the private development (a street property developed by a private developer) which people had also been calling the Agar Grove development and linking it to the Camden development. The BBC article referred to the private development and not the Council's scheme.
- Officers agreed to provide information regarding a full list of homes built to date, on future schemes that have not yet been finalised the types of houses being built, the breakdown in size in terms of bedrooms and how many of them were suitable for families to live in the area, recognising the importance of school places and the impact this had on helping keep families in an area.

**ACTION BY: Director of Development**

- Officers also agreed to provide information on the projected delivery timescale for the West End Lane Development.

**ACTION BY: Director of Development**

- The Council still was still seeking to meet its strategic development target of having 50% affordable housing which was linked to the Mayor of London's plan, which sought 35% affordable housing.
- The Council was also one of the few planning authorities to have an affordable housing target for small developments, and it also had various mechanisms which sought to claw back money if developers made more profit than they originally expected.
- The national picture was one where many developers and housing associations were actually pulling back or stopping development, which ultimately would lead to the delivery of less housing and less affordable homes. There was therefore the need for concerted national action to increase the pace of delivery to enable housing associations and councils to build new housing.
- A good contractor would work with the local community to make them aware of the social value initiatives that were being progressed as part of a development. Officers would provide a note on the types of initiatives along with some figures about the numbers of people engaged in some of these activities.

**ACTION BY: Director of Development**

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted

**8. HOUSING'S RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE: UPDATE ON PROGRESS**

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

Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, along with Caroline Bialobrzycka, Violence Against Women and Girls Principal Policy and Projects Officer, and Hannah Slydel, Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Co-ordinator, took the meeting through the report and gave the following key responses to questions:

- The Domestic Violence Abuse Points Panel had now been adopted following the pilot. It provided structure and due process to the consideration of domestic abuse cases, and as it met weekly was able to respond rapidly should a case be brought to its attention. All such cases now went through

this route for consideration, with the outcome now being available that day so that bidding could start soon afterwards.

- The panel's membership would be expanded to include colleagues from neighbourhood services to complement those from housing allocations and the Camden Safety Net.
- Statutory restrictions were still in place in relation to joint tenancies, which meant that the Council could use the courts processes to remove a tenant from the tenancy agreement if they were not willing to do this voluntarily.
- The new process also helped to ensure that work was being done with perpetrators and those accused of domestic abuse as well, with officers seeking to prevent the actions happening again, along with resettlement and re-housing when necessary.
- Officers were undertaking a full data protection impact assessment as part of case management recording system, and were taking every single precaution to ensure that data on an individual's case was protected and only shared on a need-to-know basis.
- The universal assessment form which was being developed sought to respond to the views of those that had gone through the system, who had expressed their concern that they had to repeat their story with a new officer/service at every new point. The aim of the universal form was to speed up the decision-making process and avoid unnecessary duplication.
- The Council had sought to learn from previous cases regarding the process and support given to the individuals, with a view to shaping and improving the experience going forward. This would also involve looking at the training programs for staff, the support for staff and also making sure that managers had the right tools to do casework supervision with their staff teams, to make sure that when things had not gone well that they didn't happen again.
- The Violence Against Women and Girls, Directors Board, had a budget that had been set aside to fund further work in this area and officers would consider the impact of overcrowding on domestic abuse levels in Council housing.

**ACTION BY: Director of Housing (CB)**

- The learning and development offer covers three levels for staff in housing. Level one ensured that there was a basic awareness (all housing staff were to be required to undertake this). Level 2 was in relation to specific indicators and procedures relevant to their services, and Level 3 was around complex risk assessment.
- Staff from a number of services are receiving specialist DVA and perpetrator training, this included the outreach team, homelessness team along with colleagues in the social work teams.
- Implementation of the new procedures would be supported by the development of a case management system and dashboards. Monitoring cases would be integrated into the supervision processes. The new procedures included guidance on how to safely manage disclosures of abuse from residents. It was recognised that the new procedures and policy should

result in an increase in the number of domestic violence abuse cases being identified.

- Work with the Community Safety Team was taking place to ensure domestic abuse was not being identified as anti-social behaviour.

The scrutiny committee thanked officers for this report.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted

**9. CABINET ADVISOR REPORT ON IMPROVING SERVICES TO CAMDEN LEASEHOLDERS AND ADVOCATING FOR LEASEHOLDERS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Adviser on Improving Services to Camden Leaseholders and Advocating for Leaseholders.

Councillor James Slater, Cabinet Adviser on Improving Services to Camden Leaseholders and Advocating for Leaseholders, took the meeting through the report and gave the following key responses to questions:

- Improving the experience of housing services and processes operated by the Council would benefit both leaseholders and tenants.
- Providing clear and transparent information that was easy for leaseholders and officers in leaseholder services to understand, would enable a reduction in the questioning process surrounding work delivery and bill related issues. Getting communication right was key to building trust and understanding between the Council and leaseholders.
- Currently Leaseholder Services provided an information point for leaseholders regarding a range of issues, better Council processes (especially the Council's website) that enabled the leaseholder to find the information through other sources (e.g. Camden Account) would free up Leaseholder Services staff to undertake leaseholder only duties. The Council could look at examples elsewhere to see other ways of providing information, especially to private rented tenants of leaseholders.
- The Council should look at best practice from other boroughs and set up a working group together with leaseholders, to work out how repairs and leaseholder services could work better together. This was something that was supported by the Leaseholders Forum. Acting on this soon would send a clear message to leaseholders that the authority was listening and wanted an improved service experience for them. This would help with building trust with leaseholders as some leaseholders felt the Council saw them as not being as important as tenants. Leaseholders needed to feel that they were an equal partner.
- Leaseholders themselves did play a very active role in TRAs and DMCs but different parts of the borough had a higher level of involvement than others,

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with leaseholders who lived in street properties being less involved in the formal engagement processes.

- The intensive estate engagement work that was being undertaken by the Council was having a positive impact with the community, leading to leaseholders wanting to be more involved in housing and community issues.
- Building good relationships with leaseholders was important in developing their trust, and that was something that the proposed deputy cabinet member should seek to continue undertaking should that role be established.

The scrutiny committee members welcomed the report and the hard work that Councillor Slater had done in listening, working and earning the trust of leaseholders through this process. This was something that the scrutiny committee would want to monitor going forward.

Councillor Slater thanked the councillors and officers who had helped him with the process of delivering his report.

Councillor Meric Apak, Cabinet Member Better Homes, welcomed the proposals set out in the report and advised that the Cabinet would give them due consideration when the report was submitted to it for decision.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted and the recommendations be endorsed

**10. CABINET MEMBER BETTER HOMES - ANNUAL REPORT**

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Member Better Homes

Councillor Meric Apak, Cabinet Member Better Homes, took the meeting through the report and he gave the following key responses to questions:

- Officers in Housing, Community Safety and Legal were working together to provide advice regarding the powers the Council had to ban XL-Bully dogs from Council properties along with the ability to enforce this action on tenants and leaseholders.
- Officers would provide members of the scrutiny committee with a briefing note regarding the operating hours of the repairs services call centre, and other remote ways of contacting them (along with whether the service was closed during normal working hours), how that could be used to make it easier for tenants and residents to navigate along with the communication journey for tenants, and the rationale for that.

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

- The Council had moved to enable people to use remote processes to contact the Council to report repairs issues, so that it could free up the telephone lines for those people that wanted to use them instead. The evidence was that overall this was working in practice, as the number of telephone calls had been greatly reduced whilst there had been a huge increase in the repairs issues being report remotely.
- Officers had started an important project which was seeking to transform and replace the customer online account to one with better design and integration.
- The Council was currently dealing with 700 damp and mould cases at the moment, with 12 inquires being reported on a daily basis. When necessary the Council would return to tenants homes to re-do mould washes. Officers would provide information regarding the number of new cases that were being reported on a daily basis.

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

- In the past contracts had been drawn up so that the contractor providing a repairs service was required to monitor their own work and provide the Council of evidence regarding the outcomes from this. This position had now changed with the Council's own clerk of works and contract managers reviewing and monitoring the works being provided by contractors. This was something that the scrutiny committee could consider scrutinising in further detail if they wished.
- Communicating well with tenants and residents, something that had been raised on a number of times at the meeting, was key in transforming their experience of service delivery. This theme was driving the service changes that the department was going through. Processes and exchanges with tenants and residents had to work through their normal channels so that they had confidence and trust in the systems they had to use.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the report be noted

**11. HOMELESSNESS SCRUTINY PANEL REPORT**

Consideration was given to the report of the Homelessness Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor Kemi Atolagbe, Chair of the Homelessness Scrutiny Panel, took the meeting through the report.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT approval be given to the recommendations of the Homelessness Scrutiny Panel as set out in section 8 of the report, and officers produce a response to these recommendations to the July 2024 meeting of the scrutiny committee.

**ACTION BY: Director of Housing**

**12. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN**

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

The scrutiny committee asked that the following matters be added to the provisional work programme for the 2024/25 municipal year:

- Review of Rough Sleepers
- Homelessness Scrutiny Panel officer response report (July meeting)
- Anti-social (including irresponsible dog ownership, the powers the Council had to deal with this issue, and the banning of XL Bully Dogs from Council homes)
- Leaseholder Services (including an update arising from the Cabinet's consideration of the recommendations of the Cabinet Adviser's report)
- New tenancies - Feedback from tenants
- Repairs service (e.g. performance monitoring, both in-house and contractors, value for money, quality of work, communication with tenants and leaseholders during major works schemes, developing skills and training for the future)

Also in relation to the 3 co-opted places on the scrutiny committee the scrutiny committee agreed that Vic Seedman should be put forward as a co-opted member for the 24/25 municipal year, and the chair along with officers would make recommendations to the July scrutiny committee regarding the other 2 co-opted member places.

The scrutiny committee then thanked Bev Chambers for acting as one of its co-opted members.

The scrutiny committee also asked officers to set up a work programme setting session to take place in June where it would be able to discuss its work programme for 24/25.

**Programme of meetings 2024/25 (new items in bold)**

16<sup>th</sup> July

- **Appointment of Co-opted Members**
- **Homelessness Scrutiny Panel report – Officer response**

7<sup>th</sup> October  
12<sup>th</sup> Nov  
10<sup>th</sup> Dec  
13<sup>th</sup> Jan  
25<sup>th</sup> Feb

**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
- **Review of Rough Sleepers**
- **Homelessness Scrutiny Panel officer response report (July meeting)**
- **Anti-social (including irresponsible dog ownership, the powers the Council to had deal with this issue, and the banning of XL Bully Dogs from Council homes)**
- **Leaseholder Services (including an update arising from the Cabinet's consideration of the recommendations of the Cabinet Adviser's report)**
- **New tenancies - Feedback from tenants**
- **Repairs service (e.g. performance monitoring, both in-house and contractors, value for money, quality of work, communication with tenants and leaseholders during major works schemes, developing skills and training for the future)**

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the report work programme be revised as outlined above and the proposals regarding the filling of the co-opted member places for 2024/25 be endorsed.

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

There were none.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm.

**CHAIR**

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**MINUTES END**