

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE: Housing Transformation Programme Update	
REPORT OF: Director of Housing Services, Director of Property Management	
FOR SUBMISSION TO: Housing Scrutiny Committee	DATE: 12 th November 2024
<p>SUMMARY OF REPORT</p> <p>The purpose of this paper is to update the Housing Scrutiny Committee on progress of the Housing Transformation programme, raise awareness of key pieces of work and immediate priorities within the programme.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>No documents have been used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p>Contact Officer:</p> <p>Elly Shepherd – Head of Housing Policy, Performance and Assurance</p>	
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>Housing Scrutiny Committee are asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the overall programme approach and immediate priorities 2. Note the importance of cross-council and Member support for the programme 	

Signed: Glendine Shepherd



Date: 30/10/2024

1. Context of Housing transformation

- 1.1. Camden Council wants people who live in Camden to have a place to call home. In 'We Make Camden', we recognise that a good home is a vital part of nearly every aspect of people's lives. Through the social housing, Camden Council plays a big part in the lives of tenants, estates, and communities. Council homes are an important part of connecting us into the wider Camden community and to connect people to services and support. Providing high quality housing services provides a platform for the Council to engage individuals, families and communities on wider preventative and support services – whether that is education, training, employment support or care. With a third of the Borough's housing managed by the Council, there is a huge opportunity to make a difference. The Housing and Repairs Transformation programme is the vehicle for that change.
- 1.2. However, this aspiration needs to be set against a context of serious financial, regulatory, and delivery challenges. These in turn need to be understood against the background of a structural crisis in the UK housing market which has become an increasingly high-profile, political issue and has particularly acute manifestations locally in Camden. The scale and challenge of improving Camden's housing stock and services cannot be underestimated.
- 1.3. There are many factors that have led to the increasing challenge across the housing sector, but by far one of the most crucial is the financing and the precariousness of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) position. As described in detail in the [2024/25 HRA rent setting report](#) a number of austerity-driven policy changes most notably the enforced rent reductions in the period 2016-2020 have resulted in a cumulative loss in rental income by 2023/24 of £135m.
- 1.4. In addition, emerging crises around fire safety and damp & mould in particular, have led to a large unanticipated increase in spend. Camden Council has spent £207 million of its own resources on fire and building safety capital works since 2017 and it has had to divert revenue budgets away from other activities to tackle building safety and damp & mould. The result of this spending has meant that Camden has had to divert HRA resources away from other investment and to draw on reserves, which compromises the council's ability to respond to future shocks.
- 1.5. At the same time as this huge pressure on finances, the demand for social housing has only increased, fuelled by the depletion in affordable private rental properties and poor private rental conditions. Homeless presentations at the Council have risen sharply and are on track to have increased by almost 61% at the start of this year compared to 2022. With around 40% less PRS properties to offer residents since 2019, there has been a sharp rise in those placed in temporary accommodation and joining Camden's housing register, which comes with additional financial pressures on both the general fund and HRA.

1.6. Amidst these crises, the previous government introduced the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 to introduce Ofsted and CQC-style inspections for social housing providers against the Regulator for Social Housing's four [consumer standards](#). As a landlord, Camden is expected to make informed investment decisions to be able to improve the quality of its housing stock, as well as have a deep understanding of the needs of tenants which should inform the way the Council communicates and engages with tenants. The increase in maladministration rates issued by the Housing Ombudsman by over 300% across the sector, this has also meant Local Authority landlords are under increasing media scrutiny.

1.7. The difficulties of meeting regulatory compliance is compounded by the age, condition and level of non-compliance of Camden's housing stock against the Decent Homes Standard, which currently sits at 9%. It is worth noting that this level of non-compliance sits below the London-average, and proactive decisions in recent years have produced the following achievements:

- 50,000+ Fire Risk Assessment actions completed and no outstanding High Risk Actions remaining
- 150 homes retrofitted and 150 in current retrofit programme with significant grant funding secured
- Resident satisfaction 'Tenant Satisfaction Measures' above the London average
- Of the 30% of residents having reported D&M, only 1% have a current case
- First tranche of Building Safety Case Files submitted to the regulator

1.8. Despite these positive steps, the challenge remains that the level of investment needed to fully achieve compliance is far in excess of the available budgets and capacity to deliver the work. Work to develop an Asset Management Strategy suggests a very significant financial gap between a minimum viable investment strategy (to ensure compliance) and the resources the Council has for the housing capital programme. The strategy will look at options to bridge this gap.

1.9. Despite the significant structural challenges across the sector, Camden is ambitious and wants to deliver services beyond the baseline set by the Regulator. In order to do so, a generationally significant transformation of Camden Council's housing and repair model is required. This is to see the Council's housing services both in the context of wider Council services and the shared ambitions articulated through 'We Make Camden' of helping people grow, live and age well and to tackle inequality. 'We Make Camden' and 'The Way We Work' set both a direction and an approach, establishing a focus for transformation that services are:

- Relational – prioritising building trust with people the Council will have long-term interactions with

- Accessible – ensuring services are responsive and designed to respond to people’s priorities with a focus on creating digital era services
- Driven by data – using data to continue to improve – and continue to understand inequalities of access and outcome for Camden residents
- Connected to Camden tenants and their aspirations for their lives and communities.

1.10. The work to respond to these priorities and align housing and repairs services will require a very significant cross-council corporate effort. The Housing Transformation Programme provides the Council with the vehicle for this transformation, providing the necessary multi-disciplinary resources and focus to help us achieve compliance and financial viability in the short and medium term, with the ambition to become a leading social landlord.

2. Recent achievements of the Programme

2.1. Since 2022, colleagues across Housing and Repairs have been working to improve Camden’s housing services, with various successful pieces of work completed. This includes launching a consultation for the restructure of Housing Services to ensure that the service is set up to make large-scale improvements once they are in place (further detail on the restructure is provided later in this report). Further successes of the programme has also achieved the following:

- The streamlining of housing service areas (from eight to four services), with new heads of services in place and delivering local improvements.
- The increase in rent arrears has slowed (from a 24% increase in 2023 to 1% in 2024), and a new digital system, RentSense, has been implemented to support officers in the prevention and recovery of rent arrears.
- The completion of the discovery of business requirements for Data and Digital Service projects across Housing and Property services, setting the programme team up to deliver on changes to systems over the coming years.
- Creation of a Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy and Procedure for Housing and improvements to the front door for victims fleeing DVA, helping the Council to achieve Domestic Abuse Housing Accreditation next year.
- Various Residents’ Panels established, recruited to and successfully helping to analyse the Council’s service delivery, performance and complaints.
- Developed a Council-wide approach to tackling ASB across the borough, including the creation of an ASB taskforce, recruitment of five ASB officers dedicated to tackling ASB on housing estates and training for NHOs based on a new cross-council ASB Policy and Procedure.

- Successful delivery of the Resident Action Day, attended by over 100 tenant and leaseholders who participated in several workshops and provided feedback on their experience as tenants.
- Completion of recent external and communal stock condition survey and the commencement of 100% internal surveys to inform the development of an asset management strategy and programmes of work

3. Workstreams and upcoming priorities of HT Programme

3.1. Given the scale and importance of the challenge, the programme team and senior responsible officers (SRO) recently reorganised programme activity into six distinct workstreams, each with clearly defined scope and benefits to residents and frontline staff.

3.2. There are three distinct workstreams that sit within housing and repairs services, and three workstreams that make up 'enabling functions', representing support from services across the Council (e.g. Finance, HR, DDS) that enable and equip delivery across the programme. Details of each workstream are provided below:

Workstream	Description	SRO
Quality Homes	Ensuring Camden homes are safe, warm, dry and compliant, backed by a fit-for-purpose repairs service that ensures repairs are carried out efficiently, to the right standards	Gavin Haynes (Director of Property Management)
Housing Services	Providing high-quality, relational housing services based in neighbourhoods	Glendine Shepherd (Director of Housing Services)
Resident-centred	Changing the way Camden's housing and repairs work with residents that is transparent, accountable and empowering	Scot Reid (Head of Property Customer Services and Contact)
Living Within Our Means (Enabling Functions)	Committing to ensuring a balanced Housing Revenue Account and supporting long-term financial stability	Jon Rowney (Executive Director Corporate Services)

Data and Digital (Enabling Functions)	Enabling services with the right digital tools, systems, and data that is accurate and allows for continuous improvement	Jon Rowney (Executive Director Corporate Services)
The Way We Work In Housing (Enabling Functions)	Creating the conditions for staff to embed a culture of working that is proactive, responsive, relational and empathetic	Joanna Brown (Director of People and Inclusion)

3.3. Whilst there are many activities within the programme, it is useful for Housing Scrutiny Committee to note the current activity areas that the programme is prioritising and working to. These include:

- Ensuring Regulatory Compliance - preparing for and interpreting the Regulator of Social Housing's requirements (the 'Consumer Standards'), and mapping these against programme ambitions to prioritise efforts and resources appropriately. Such activity includes the development of an Asset Management Strategy, Service Standards, as well as key policies and procedures, e.g. Adaptation Policy and Repairs Policy.
- Transforming the Housing 'Front Door' – reshaping Camden's resident-facing contact channels and back-end processes to enable joined-up, accessible and easy-to-navigate services for tenants, leaseholders and officers. This will be underpinned by effective self-service options for residents, as well as the right tools, digital systems and autonomy that enable frontline staff to be accessible, able to provide the right support and advice quickly, with minimal handoffs.
- Asset Management Strategy – the development of a strategy that will set out the required trade-offs around investment in Camden's stock to manage the future of the Housing Revenue Account. This will set out the scale of the investment required to ensure stock meets regulatory requirements and the different options for generating the resources to fund these works.
- Relational Practice Model – development of a practice model for housing staff, providing the skills to employ trauma-informed practice, reflective practice, and provide a scaffolding for frontline staff and those managing them. This needs to be developed in step with the wider organisational approach and the opportunity afforded by the new Director of Relational Practice role and work to establish the Centre for Relational Practice.
- Housing & Property Digital Change Programme – a DDS-led programme underpinning the transformation of Housing and Property service areas, seeking to deliver efficient, responsive, and user-friendly data and digital

systems that meet the needs of Camden's residents and support the Council's long-term ambitions to be a relational landlord.

- Improving Data Services – across Supporting Communities, effort and resources are being put into improving the Council's data services, so teams can be confident that the data the Council holds is compliant, accurate, accessible and can be used to develop insights about services and residents. This will provide the conditions to continuously improve towards predictive and preventative models of service delivery and will underpin the success of those programme priorities listed above.
- Neighbourhoods Programme – working closely with this programme and supporting the Kentish Town Pilot by aligning approach to overlapping priorities in relation to the future neighbourhoods operating model and place-based services for Council tenants.
- Tenant Participation Model – development of a participation model that adopts the 'We Make Camden' participation approach to redesigning tenant participation within housing services, and to champion and enable community power on estates and neighbourhoods
- Voids Service Improvement – Working closely with colleagues across Housing and Property Management services to implement improvements across the Voids key-to-key process and reduce void turnaround times, such as conducting pre-void inspections by officers, facilitating early viewings with prospective tenants, and adding additional contractors to reduce turnaround times of voids in the repairs stage.

3.4. To ensure the programme is properly resourced, a Housing Policy, Performance and Assurance service has been established, sitting within Supporting Communities to work across Housing and Property Management. As well as being responsible for driving the programme, the new team will embed a culture of continuous improvement across Housing and Property Management and ensure Camden is resilient to any future changes to the Housing sector, including those of the Regulator of Social Housing.

4. Restructure of Housing Services

4.1. Across London there are high levels of turnover and sickness in the Housing sector, due to increasingly tougher demands and working environment, and higher workloads. One of the key drivers of the restructure and the wider transformation is improving the 'The Way We Work in Housing' to better support staff to keep them in posts, reduce long term sickness to ensure more consistent service delivery to residents.

4.2. The restructure has carefully managed and a transition plan for the next 12 months has been developed to ensure uninterrupted service delivery. Wherever vacancies have arisen or staff have left the council, interim solutions are in place

to maintain continuity and support both residents and staff throughout this period.

4.3. However during any period of organisational change there will be anxiety and stress about the future and this is no different in Housing. Certain steps have been taken to support staff through this process, including:

- Training sessions with staff to prepare them for the implementation of the restructure,
- Signposting to the Council's cross-organisational Employee Assistance Programme
- Engaging union reps closely throughout the process
- Holding sessions with teams in various locations across the borough to ensure they can talk to senior management and have open and honest conversations about change.
- Recommissioning of the Psychologically Informed Consultation and Training team to support teams navigating tricky cases

4.4. Recruitment is now underway following a period of consultation with staff and unions. Appointments into all vacant roles should conclude by the end of this calendar year. Please see Appendix A for detail on the new Housing Services structure.

5. Finance Comments of the Executive Director Corporate Services

5.1. The Housing Revenue Account is a ringfenced account which means all expenditure must by statute be funded from rental and service charge income and other income generated from HRA assets. It cannot be subsidised by or provide subsidy to the Council's General Fund.

5.2. As noted in paras 1.3 and 1.4 the HRA is under severe financial pressure at present which means there is very limited new funding available for the Housing Transformation Programme. The programme will therefore be delivered largely within existing resources. Where new budgets are required, they are built into the medium-term financial planning process, and savings may be required elsewhere.

6. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

6.1. *The Borough Solicitor has been consulted and has no legal comments.*

7. Environmental Implications

7.1. *No environment impact*

8. Appendices

- Appendix A - New Housing Services Structure 2024

REPORT ENDS