

COUNCIL – 18th NOVEMBER 2024

BUSINESS FROM THE ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETINGS ON 14th OCTOBER 2024

Report of the Borough Solicitor

This report relates to the unconsidered motions and the responses to written Council questions from the Council meeting held on 14th October 2024.

1. Background

The Constitution advises that where motions have not been dealt with by the conclusion of the meeting of the Council, they fall without discussion and are passed to the relevant Cabinet Member or Committee Chair whose response is then to be provided to the next meeting of the Council. Also the responses to written questions that were provided for last ordinary Council meeting are to be circulated as part of the next meeting's agenda for information. These responses are then noted at that next meeting without debate.

2. Responses to motions

At the meeting of the Council held on 14th October, there were 3 motions that were not considered due to lack of time. As the Constitution requires, these motions were passed to the relevant Cabinet Members or Committee Chairs, who are required to report back to the next meeting of the Council. A copy of the motions and the responses are attached at Appendix A to this report.

3. Responses to written questions from Councillors

The written questions from Councillors and the responses from Cabinet Members linked to the Council meeting on 14th October 2024 are attached as Appendix B.

4. Recommendation

That the report be noted.

COUNCIL 14th OCTOBER 2024

UNCONSIDERED MOTIONS

Appendix A

- 1. To consider the following motion, notice of which was given by Councillor Steve Adams and which was seconded by Councillor Andrew Parkinson**

The Council notes that the public's faith in the method of Camden Council's consultation on various issues has diminished and seeks to repair this.

The requirement to embark on engagement with residents cannot be met by the imposition of stilted consultation actions.

The Council resolves to return to true, open consultation without pre-judgment, without leading questions and with an open mind and the intent of respecting the stated opinions of residents and not selecting to note only those responses that suit the designs of the Council.

RESPONSE BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

As Leader of the Council, I am committed to strengthening resident's connections to the borough, increase their trust in local democracy and demonstrate an increased sense of civic pride. Consultations are one means of achieving this. I recognise the strength in efficient and proactive consultations and recognise how they help us to make better decisions and improve outcomes. We want to involve residents in the trickier challenges and issues we face, recognising that the Council cannot work in isolation.

We continue to build on our successful track record of sharing power with citizens through innovative deliberative approaches. We were the first local authority in the country to run a Climate Crisis Citizens Assembly, and have also run powerful Citizen's Assemblies on Camden Health and Care and Evening and Night-Time strategy. We continue to invest in our Housing and properties residents' panel and develop the Good Life Camden framework – which has been codesigned with residents and staff and the framework articulates what it means to live a 'good life' in Camden. As Cabinet Member for Finance, I personally worked on resident's panels for the Data Charter, which enabled the Council to open up services and supported residents to hold us to account.

When appropriate, our citizen involvement approach includes formal consultation and we recognise that councils should consult when statute says they should; they have done so in the past; and there is a legitimate expectation that they will again, and otherwise, fairness dictates that its appropriate.

Formal consultation often takes place after a period of resident engagement and involvement – with proposals or options that are put forward in formal consultation having been developed alongside citizens.

- consultation must take place when the proposal is still at a formative stage;

- sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response;
- adequate time must be given for consideration and response; and
- the results of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account.

A failure to consult properly may constitute grounds for a public body to be challenged in the courts by way of judicial review. Therefore we apply the public law principles on consultation carefully and ensure our internal processes for consultation are clear and robust where a duty to consult applies.

I recognise that consultations are an opportunity to understand concerns, ideas and the general reaction to proposals. The results should be carefully considered by the decision maker. Consultations are not, however, plebiscites nor do they relieve decision makers of their obligation to make a decision. They are for the most part, about how to implement a proposal, not whether to. Further, while the proposals must be in a formative stage they clearly have to be formulated to an extent that allows proposals to be put forward for comment.

Camden Council has a strong track record of not only consulting properly and lawfully but in embedding innovative approaches to citizen participation and engagement in the design of our services and in decision making processes. Consultation findings are always considered carefully by our councillors, alongside other important considerations such as our equality duties. The Council resolves to continue to place citizen participation, engagement and consultation at heart of everything it does and will continue to comply with its legal obligations. Achieving our We Make Camden ambitions requires a whole borough, collaborative approach and we recognise the strength our residents play in achieving our vision of making Camden a place for everyone and delivering the best possible services we can.

2. To consider the following motion, notice of which was given by Councillor James Slater and which was seconded by Councillor Tommy Gale

This Council notes:

- That the new Labour Government is committed to strengthening our democracy and upholding the integrity of elections across the UK.
- During the 2024 General Election, there were reports of intimidation at polling stations as well as flyposting in the borough. This was followed by misinformation and inappropriate inactivity in the recent by-elections.
- In more transient and younger areas, more eligible voters are unregistered.
- During the pandemic, Camden Council wrote to all registered voters with information about how to sign up for a postal vote, and has since regularly reminder voters about this option across all its channels and signposted how this might be done, which has led to an increase in those applying.

This Council believes:

- Protecting the right to vote, and the ability for people to do so without intimidation, is central to our democracy.
- The Labour Government is right to review rules around voter ID to expand eligibility and make it easier to vote and address inconsistencies in the system.
- The Government should review the legislation around protecting polling stations from intimidation and interference as part of its work on Defending Democracy.

This Council resolves:

- To call on the new Labour government to introduce automatic voter registration.
- To send correspondence to all voters in Camden with information about signing up for a postal vote in the next year.
- To write to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to call for a review of the guidance and legislation around conduct outside of polling stations.

RESPONSE BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

As Leader, I'm committed to protecting the right to vote and ensuring the integrity of elections because they are fundamental to maintaining a healthy, functional democracy. Voting is the core way that Camden residents can express their voices and influence Council decisions, and it ensures that elected members represent the will of the people rather than a select few. I absolutely recognise that if some groups face barriers to voting, then certain perspectives and needs go unrepresented, leading to policies that don't serve the needs of residents.

Camden is committed to ensuring that residents are aware of their voting rights and requirements to vote. In the lead-up to both the GLA and General Election this year, we developed and delivered a multi-channel communications campaign to support voter registration across Camden and raise awareness and understanding of the new requirements to present photographic ID when voting in person. This included raising awareness of and encouraging people to apply for Voter Authority Certificates where needed, as well as postal and proxy votes.

We used a range of channels, networks and tactics to reach all Camden residents – including through news items; two letters to all residents; bus stops across the borough from late 2023 onwards; social media and e-newsletter content; content shared with elected members, partners and universities; posters, leaflets and digital screens in our libraries; a range of advertisements in the CNJ – including in the weeks leading up to the General Election – and internal messaging for Camden staff.

Camden officials also supported the programme of outreach in the lead-up to the elections by Camden's 'Elections Bus' team, who travelled to a number of community centres to raise awareness of the elections, and supported people to register to vote. The bus team also checked if residents had accepted ID and, if not, apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. We produced a range of scripts for colleagues working on the bus, as well as leaflets and posters, and promoted to our residents the bus' locations.

In the summer's General Election, 193 Camden voters were not issued with a ballot paper after failing to produce the correct voting ID. 111 of these voters returned with correct paperwork and were able to vote.

Officers are now supporting the service with the annual canvass through communications across Camden channels, including on social media and in the Housing News publication, going to all Camden tenants and leaseholders.

I agree that the Council will consider any proposals brought forward by the Government to amend the present voting arrangement.

3. To consider the following motion, notice of which was given by Councillor Nancy Jirira and which was seconded by Councillor Tom Simon

This Council notes:

- The increase in Stage One Complaints about the housing repairs service from 728 in 2021-22 to 1150 in 2022-23 to 1564 in 2023-24.
- The failure to respond to even half of those complaints within the Housing Ombudsman's recommended timescale.
- The high and growing number of Member's Enquiries about housing repairs.
- The findings of maladministration against the council by the Housing Ombudsman.
- The inaugural Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey which shows satisfaction with housing repairs at around the London average, in a field with some terrible performances.
- Constant stories in the local press about poor quality service.

This Council believes:

That a high-quality repairs service is essential for the wellbeing of the Council's tenants.

The Labour administration's frequent claims over the last 14 years to be improving this service have failed to address the fundamental problems of poor communication, missed appointments, poor quality work and damp & mould issues.

That Camden Council should have the ambition to have the best housing repairs service in the UK.

This Council calls on:

The Cabinet Member for Better Homes to set out the administration's plans to realise that ambition.

RESPONSE BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR BETTER HOMES

The Council places tenants' wellbeing centrally in its repairs service and, as further noted below, is undertaking significant work to improve service delivery. Experience of repairs is undoubtedly of critical importance and detailed work has been done by this Council to meet the various challenges and provide a robust repairs service, accompanied by innovation in access to its services, new methods of in depth and intensive resident engagement and significant shifts in its approach to fire and building safety.

It must be noted that the operating environment for all social housing landlords is very far from optimal.

The impact of the four-year rent reduction and various rent caps, have cost Camden £167m by 2024/25 and meaning our budget is £32m lower than it otherwise would be. This is combined with inflation following the invasion of Ukraine, hikes in interest rates caused by the mini-budget, personnel shortages exacerbated by Brexit and a swell of demand that followed the pandemic (repairs increased 43% in 2021/22). Nationally, the 2016-20 social rent cut alone reduced council landlords' rent revenue by £2.4 billion over four years, amounting to an estimated £40 billion by 2042. Further rent caps have reduced revenue by a further £900m.

These rent policy decisions leave London boroughs facing a specific gap of £700m over the next four years. Pressures are so acute that boroughs are budgeting for £170m of cuts to spending on supervision, management, maintenance and repairs over the next four years to balance their HRA accounts, and some are forced to focus only on the most urgent repairs and delaying much-needed improvements. While we are not in that position in Camden, the operating position is grim sector wide.

Earlier this year the Housing Ombudsman noted that 47% of the cases they determined in 2023-24 were from residents living in a London postcode, this reflecting challenges around the age of the stock, the density of accommodation, levels of overcrowding and the associated challenges this brings.

We must also reflect on the tragic death of Awaab Ishak in December 2020. Following the findings of the inquest in November 2022, the repairs service put in place a proactive communications programme, contacting over 6,000 residents by sending letters, text messages and making phone calls; consequently, the team carried out c. 4,000 inspections and around 1,750 of these had mould washes, with 12 inspections resulting in temporary moves. The service now has a specialist damp and mould team, and part of this operation includes regularly checking in with our most vulnerable by phone and letter. As a result of all this work the Council has a caseload of approximately 290 properties which it is managing proactively.

In addition, the Council is operating in a post-Grenfell environment where the bar has been rightly raised on resident safety. No new burdens funding has been provided and the Council has diverted £4.5m of revenue per annum into its response to the Fire and Building Safety Acts, along with over £200m in capital funding (net of grants received).

Noting that it is unlikely that significant extra funding will be made available, the Council is entirely focussed on making best use of its resources, driving productivity and performance, while focusing on clearly defined service standards and a repairs policy to make sure residents are safe, warm and dry. This sustained focus has seen the number of jobs in the system (the work in progress or WIP) reduce from a post-pandemic high of over 7,000 to just over 4,000, similar to pre-pandemic levels.

The service is focussed on the development of its in-house team which has 187 trade personnel and reducing the use of sub-contracted resources to make sure we get the best out of our operational overhead. This does mean it will take longer for non-essential repairs to be done – but it is critical that we do this to contain the demand on our budgets.

The above factors and our plans for further improving the service are captured in our housing and property transformation plan, which we will be sharing with all members, and our forthcoming asset management strategy which will be presented to Cabinet later this financial year and will set out our approach to adapting to the current operating environment and making sure our residents receive services that confirm to all Regulatory standards.

Point 1

- *The increase in Stage One Complaints about the housing repairs service from 728 in 2021-22 to 1150 in 2022-23 to 1564 in 2023-24.*

Social Housing providers across the UK have seen a sharp increase in complaints about repairs, not just in Camden. As outlined earlier, the prevalence of Ombudsman cases are also higher in London than elsewhere in the country due to the complexity and challenges landlords face.

We also recognise that any dissatisfaction with the council is of concern and the impact this has on our residents. We are determined to learn from our complaints and have set up a complaints panel with residents to help us understand what we could do better. We have also appointed a lessons learned lead within the repairs team to apply learning from complaints to frontline delivery.

In terms of operating context, we also need to bear in mind that we carry out over 120,000 repairs each year; on top of this, we have extensive Better Homes and FRA works taking place at any one time, which all impact directly on our residents. The number of recorded complaints is less than 1% of all activities across property services.

Point 2

- The failure to respond to even half of those complaints within the Housing Ombudsman's recommended timescale.

We calculate response times from when the complaint was submitted and allocated to the service to investigate and reply. Based on Q4 23/24, our average response time is 70% answered in 10 days. We have a full complement of staff in place to deal with increased volumes.

It is also noted that if we measured the response times from the time a complaint had completed the triage process and was allocated to the repairs service, our responses in time would be above 88%.

Point 3

- *The high and growing number of Member's Enquiries about housing repairs.*

Many MEs about repairs relate to many different areas, not just complaints. They range from requesting tenant support, following up on existing cases, and asking for further updates. We should also point out that the response times to answering ME are above 90%, which is the best-sustained performance for some years.

Point 4

- The findings of maladministration against the council by the Housing Ombudsman.

As the number of complaints has increased, the number of maladministration cases will likely follow. Again, Camden is not alone in this. The Ombudsman has reported that Maladministration is rising across the sector and London boroughs have higher than average rates of cases being determined.

Point 5

- *The inaugural Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey which shows satisfaction with housing repairs at around the London average, in a field with some terrible performances.*

The TSM outturn reflects the operating context we have described and all landlords are working to improve their services to meet the new Regulatory Standards – which this Council fully supports. The tenant perception survey results showed that the Council was above the London average on a number of indicators and this useful comparative data will help the Council understand how it can improve its services further.

Point 6

- Constant stories in the local press about poor quality service.

Despite all the challenges, from underfunding to recruiting the right staff to attracting apprentices, our satisfaction rate with completed repairs is about 85%. Where we fail our residents, we will always raise our hands and try to rectify the situation. As set out above, we have introduced the new resident-led complaints oversight panel where residents hold officers to account for the service they deliver. We have a new lessons-learned lead officer whose job is to be the customer champion, identify themes and trends of dissatisfaction, challenge ways of working, and drive culture change across the organisation. We also have new practical measures in place such as proactive SMS messaging to notify residents of a lift or heating system problem.

ENDS

APPENDIX B

RESPONSES TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

QUESTION 1

**TO THE: CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND A SUSTAINABLE
CAMDEN**

BY: COUNCILLOR RISHI MADLANI

Could the Cabinet Member for Planning and a Sustainable Camden update the Council on Camden's response to the Mayor of London's plans to pedestrianise Oxford Street, including protecting the progress of the much needed Holborn Liveable Neighbourhood changes?

REPLY

The London-wide and national economic benefits of such a scheme are there to be seen, as are the wider benefits for air quality and health and wellbeing. This is significant development for central London and a new use of new powers so naturally we are keen to hear more from the GLA about the project and the processes involved.

We are working closely with Westminster City Council (WCC), Transport for London (TfL) and the Greater London Authority to understand further the details of these proposals. These details will help us understand both the implications and opportunities for Camden, as well as ensure that our raft of planned area improvement projects in the vicinity – such as the Holborn Liveable Neighbourhood – are fully understood and mitigated appropriately where necessary.

In particular, the Council will wish to understand the implications for bus routes, and to guard against worsened through traffic in Fitzrovia. The Council would like to work with all partners to reduce through traffic in Fitzrovia.

More broadly, the scheme and the associated establishment of the Mayoral Development Corporation could have the potential to influence wider regeneration across borough boundaries and leverage wider action across the West End area.

We are working closely with TfL to ensure that the Holborn Liveable Neighbourhood remains a key priority project for TfL in terms of the modelling and other support needed in light of these announcements. We will be seeking assurances of its protection in the TfL Business Plan to ensure that the scheme continues to be delivered at pace and as planned. Discussions with TfL and WCC will be held to discuss the Fitzrovia area in particular.

QUESTION 2

**TO THE: CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND A SUSTAINABLE
CAMDEN**

BY: COUNCILLOR JUDY DIXEY

Concerning services for blind and partially-sighted people:

1. In January 2024, Councillor Chung tabled a written question about street A Boards which impede pedestrians, and are particularly difficult for blind and partially-sighted people. The response was that the Council would undertake a 'clutter-free' street trial in selected high footfall areas with businesses, drawing on the expertise of the RNIB. With this evidence-based data and awareness of people's experience on the current A-Board management process, the trial would help inform decisions about future policy on this important question. How far has this progressed?

2. Is the Council ensuring that written communications with residents are made available to blind and partially-sighted people, particularly regarding large print and the alt text option (which ensures images are described in speech)?

3. What progress has been made in creating Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans for residents with disabilities in high-rise blocks?

4. What is the Council doing to address the problem of bus stops alongside cycle lanes, where vulnerable people, particularly blind and partially-sighted people, are expected to "cross the cycle path safely"?

In May/June 2023, Members were offered visual impairment awareness sessions from the Sight Loss Council.

What lessons were learned from these sessions, what have been put into operation, and how is the Council addressing the 4 issues above?

REPLY

I am pleased to share that Camden is working collaboratively with the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) and business districts, to develop and test a protocol on removing advertising boards and similar high street obstructions to ensure clearer passage through Camden's public realm. Focussing in a trial area, we will work through an evidence-based approach with the business community to educate and raise awareness of A-boards causing street obstructions. From this shared understanding the team will collaborate on developing innovative approaches to local business promotion to bring tangible benefits to all involved in the work.

Throughout the autumn the project team will capture pre-trial data, both lived-experience and quantitative information to help measure success and shape the future phases of work, alongside the broader project development with a proposed launch of the trial in early 2025.

1. The Communications Service follow RNIB guidelines relating to 'clear print' and large print that ensures the right standard for maximising the legibility of all of our printed documents. We follow their expert advice and researched guidance for the materials that we produce for Camden residents.

The guidelines address the use of fonts, type weight, layout, as well as design, contrast and colour. It also informs our use of photography and illustrations. For example, we print the Camden Magazine on an off-white non-glossy paper to reduce glare. The guidelines also apply to other forms of written communication such as letters and forms. News and communications campaign materials are accessible through the website and digital versions are in a fully accessible PDF format with alt-text which can be read with screen readers. We also provide publications, on request, in large print.

2. The Council has invited residents of all Council homes (including high-rise blocks) who think they may need help to evacuate their homes in an emergency to identify themselves to the Council. Where they do so a person-centred fire risk assessment is carried out by the Council's in-house Fire Safety Advisor team and Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPS) or other action developed for individual residents to address their personal circumstances.

PEEPS numbers fluctuate but in September 2024 there were a total of 152 PEEPS in place across the Council's sheltered and temporary accommodation.

Secure Premises Information Boxes, accessible to fire and emergency services have been installed in all 188 Council managed high-rise buildings, Camden's in-house Building Safety Manager Team is liaising with Neighbourhood Housing Officers to include evacuation information required by the London Fire Brigade in the boxes. The Minister for Building Safety has announced that the Government will be bringing forward new PEEPS regulations and rights for residents over the course of Autumn 2024, in anticipation of new duties the Council will be undertaking a resident survey of 6 Council high-rise blocks to provide a base line for assessing the potential number of residents who may need help to evacuate from high rise blocks.

3. With regards to bus-stops alongside cycle lanes, the Council follow's national and London wide design standards and consult's with groups representing people with disabilities during the development stage of all transport schemes (including those with bus stop bypasses proposed). Crossings points with tactile paving are provided adjacent to bus stop bypasses to ensure there is a designated place for pedestrians to cross. We ensure that road safety audits are undertaken when developing schemes and monitor bus stop bypasses with video surveys after they are installed to ensure they are operating as expected.
4. I cannot speak for other Councillors but I personally found the training extremely helpful in terms of gaining some understanding into the experience of blind and partially sighted people, including the obstructions that street clutter can pose.

QUESTION 3

TO THE: CABINET MEMBER BETTER HOMES

BY: COUNCILLOR STEVE ADAMS

The contract to re-clad the 4 larger Chalcots towers is now approximately half-way complete. Two of the towers are largely clad and the other two are scaffolded and work has commenced.

Since, that at this stage, the original contract sum has already been exceeded by approximately 34%, we believe that there is a case for a forensic assessment of how this public expenditure has mushroomed to such an extent. In response to a recent Members Enquiry, the blame for the excess cost was placed on a new design for the fixings of the new windows. Given that the windows constitute most likely 40% of the overall cost with the scaffold access and cladding remaining as priced, this would suggest that the fixings issue has caused the window part of the work to be increased by almost double. This is both hard to believe and in any event, much harder to swallow.

Public money, much of it provided by central government, is being spent but the Quantity Surveying of this project appears to be without real control over what was stated as being a “fully designed scheme” at the time of the re-tendering of the works.

Will the administration commit to a proper investigation into this?

REPLY

The Council's work at the Chalcots sees the installation of an A1 fire rated cladding and curtain wall system, which is the highest standard of safety, and good progress has been made across all five blocks. Expenditure on the Chalcots project is closely scrutinised by the Council's independent cost consultants and through regular dialogue with the Greater London Authority and the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (who have their own cost consultants to examine grant related elements of expenditure).

Movements in the scheme budget were summarised and reported in the July 2023 Medium Term Financial Strategy report to Cabinet. As described in the report the budgets were adjusted as tenders were awarded and a subsequent adjustment was made in July 2023 to allow for items such as a change in the window installation method, which was determined during the mobilisation of the works, this adjustment greatly reduces the risk of programme delays and the associated costs. As you would expect on a project of this scale a range of variances are encountered, for example the project is picking up other internal works such as re-wiring and boiler replacements. To summarise, there is extensive scrutiny of the costs being incurred on the Chalcots project and robust arrangements are in place to manage this.

QUESTION 4

TO THE: LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

BY: COUNCILLOR ANNA BURRAGE

Last New Year's Eve saw the tragic murder of Harry Pitman, just 16 years old, at the hands of another young person on Primrose Hill. At the start of this year, The Royal Parks issued a statement saying, "The Royal Parks and the Police are committed to working closely together to ensure ongoing safety."

Can the Leader of the Council please provide information regarding the work that The Royal Parks and the Police are doing to prepare for this year's festivities, and how they intend to reassure the local community and prevent a repeat of the awful events of last year?

REPLY

The Royal Parks Board took a decision in late September regarding the management of New Years Eve on Primrose Hill. The Royal Parks Board have agreed that The Royal Parks lead a Safety Advisory Group to create a management plan for News Years Eve.

Whilst the Council were not consulted on the report to the Board, we understand that there was discussion with the Metropolitan Police. This decision followed a meeting before the summer led by the Council to ensure suitable plans were in place involving The Royal Parks and Metropolitan Police.

The Met Police are committed to supporting the Royal Parks in managing activity on the Hill as part of their duties set out in the Royal Parks Regulations.

The Council will be involved in the Safety Advisory Group meetings to ensure the impact to the community and safety in the streets around the Hill are considered and planned for. The Council will also ask for clear communications to residents to ensure the local community are aware of the plan to manage the evening.

QUESTION 5

**TO THE: CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND A SUSTAINABLE
CAMDEN**

BY: COUNCILLOR IZZY LENGA

Can the Cabinet Member update the Council on the number of electric vehicle charging points in the borough and what steps have recently been taken to increase their number?

REPLY

I am pleased to report that Camden now has over 550 electric vehicle charging points. These are made up of 305 fast charging sockets, 247 slow charging sockets (lamp column charge points) and 9 rapid charging sockets.

This is quadrupling of provision since Councillors adopted the Camden Transport Strategy in 2019.

We have further plans to roll out a comprehensive network of charging points across the borough, both to meet current demand and to encourage further adoption of electric vehicles. To this end, we are in the process of finalising plans for the delivery of up to 700 fast-charging and 18 rapid charging sockets by 2026.

We have also bid to the Department for Transport's Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) scheme for funding to implement a minimum 500 slow-charging sockets (lamp column chargers). We will continue exploring all available funding opportunities to deliver this network.

QUESTION 6

TO THE: CABINET MEMBER FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES

BY: COUNCILLOR LIAM MARTIN-LANE

Can the Cabinet Member please tell us how many Police Officers we currently have in the Borough Command Unit? What plans are there to advocate for a greater number of community officers in Camden, able to quickly respond to resident callouts?

REPLY

The Metropolitan Police Service structure includes twelve Basic Command Units or BCUs which operate across London. The Central North BCU covers both Camden and Islington.

The Met Police has retained a commitment to ensure that each ward across London has a dedicated Safer Neighbourhood Team comprising of one Sergeant, two Police Constables and three Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).

As of August this year, the total number of police officers working in the Central North BCU was 1361. This figure included fifty Police Constables and thirty-five Police Community Support Officers working in Camden ward Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

I fully recognise the vital importance of the role played by Met Police Ward Safer Neighbourhood Teams in responding to local issues and engaging with communities across Camden.

I endorse the commitment to 'community crime fighting' outlined within the 'A New Met for London' strategy which was published by the Metropolitan Police earlier this year. It is extremely important that the Met Police is successfully able to achieve its commitment to recruit more Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) to enhance the response to ward-based policing priorities. This commitment to strengthen neighbourhood teams will also play an important part in ongoing efforts to rebuild trust and confidence in the Met Police.

The Council will continue to highlight the vital importance of neighbourhood policing and the need for the Met Police to continue to prioritise the delivery of its commitment's also outlined within it's 'Strongest Ever Neighbourhoods' programme.

We will also continue to pro-actively engage with the Central North BCU Borough Commander and the local Camden Police leadership team to review progress against these important commitments. I shall also endeavour to continue to liaise with Safer Communities cabinet portfolio holders at other London Boroughs and ensure that Camden is represented at strategic partnership forums delivered via the London Mayors Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC).

We at Camden remain committed to further strengthening our partnership with the Metropolitan Police to develop a range of community safety focused strategic and operational initiatives on behalf of Camden residents, businesses and community organisations

QUESTION 7

TO THE: CABINET MEMBER FOR BEST START FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

BY: COUNCILLOR EDMUND FRONDIGOUN

In recent months we have heard much about the use of Artificial Intelligence at the workplace. A recent article cited an example of Camden Adult Social Care workers using AI to identify potential tech training for clients. Furthermore, the ministerial team at the Department for Education have been stressing how important it will be to use data more effectively to identify need for residents, particularly for those who might be susceptible to intersectional failures. What is this Council doing in Children and Learning to use such technology to improve our services, and what plans does it have to develop these further?

REPLY

The Council will specifically begin to explore the use of AI in Children and Learning services in the new year, focusing on integrating technology in a way that aligns with the borough's values and community needs. Currently, the Council is building robust data foundations, a necessary step for effective AI implementation. While some very basic AI productivity tools like Magic Notes and Co-Pilot are looking to be trialled across the Council, including CSC, we plan to explore more advanced AI use cases once our Master Data Management system is fully in place next year. All initiatives

will adhere to Camden's Data Charter and go through Council processes to ensure they align with community standards and values.

The use of AI in social care is something that requires particularly careful consideration. Used well, in some circumstances, AI does present opportunities to help professionals to make positive changes. Used poorly, or in the wrong contexts, it has the potential to be ineffective, or worse, actively cause harm.

In the borough of Camden, our approach towards the integration of Artificial Intelligence is grounded in a deep commitment to our community's values and needs. Recognising the potential of AI as a tool to confront our borough's challenges, we place significant emphasis on aligning its use with the ethical framework provided by Camden's Data Charter and concentrating on building firm data foundations to ensure high quality outputs.

At the heart of our philosophy is the belief that technology, including AI, should serve as a complement to, not a replacement for, the human element in our services. The relationships we have built within our community are the foundation of our work, and it is crucial that the introduction of any technology supports and enhances these relationships, rather than undermining them. Our frontline staff are integral to this vision; their decision-making abilities and insights are invaluable, and any technological advancement we adopt must aim to empower, not override, their expertise.

In essence, Camden's stance on AI is rooted in a human-centred perspective. It's about harnessing technology in a way that respects our core values and enhances the community's well-being. By committing to these principles, we aim to utilize AI not just as a technological innovation, but as a means to further enrich and support the lives of the citizens at the heart of everything we do.

QUESTION 8

**TO THE: CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND A SUSTAINABLE
CAMDEN**

BY: COUNCILLOR SHARON HARDWICK

To ask the Cabinet Member what powers we have as a Council to enforce 3rd party licensed waste carriers such as Biffa and First Mile to work within Camden's time bands when collecting business waste?

REPLY

Unfortunately, First Mile and Biffa have both recently been letting Camden down with their poor record on collections, which have affected areas from West End Lane to the West End.

Camden already uses 'time banded collections' on a number of high streets, which state when waste can be placed out on the street ready for collection. All waste

companies are aware of Camden's 'time banded collection' areas and should respect this.

However, I have asked the team to look at what more we can do. It is disappointing that these companies are behaving in this way and the situation cannot be allowed to continue.

QUESTION 9

**TO THE: CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND A SUSTAINABLE
CAMDEN**

BY: COUNCILLOR NINA DE AYALA PARKER

A Camden Nature Corridor has been proposed which would improve and link five Camden Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation through specific green infrastructure in three priority Camden development sites – Murphy's Yard, Regis Road Estate and West Kentish Town Estate re-development. Does the Council agree that this is a model for how it can achieve both its new targets for housing and for nature recovery targets, delivering better health and well-being to existing and new communities in Camden Areas of Deficiency in Access to Nature?

REPLY

We welcome the proposal for a Camden Nature Corridor – and I would like to thank members of the public and individual Councillors for championing the idea. The group of local residents making this proposal have submitted this as part of the Camden Local Plan consultation, and our Chief Planner and Director of Recreation joined the walk hosted by the group in September to better understand the suggestion.

If we are to effect nature recovery within the borough, it is vital the Council is able to influence the location, type, extent and quality of natural green space created within developments. The Camden Nature Corridor shows what that influence should aim to deliver.

The concept of creating corridors and improvements to Sites of Importance to Nature Conservation are consistent with the Council's existing Biodiversity Strategy (Creating space for Nature in Camden), the GLA's emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework. The new proposals are also consistent with existing Local Planning Policy, with the boundaries to the north, west and south of Murphy's Yard identified as Habitat Corridors in the Policies Map. Policy A3 (Biodiversity) states "*The Council will protect and enhance sites of nature conservation and biodiversity. We will:...secure improvements to green corridors, particularly where a development scheme is adjacent to an existing corridor...*"

Looking to the future, we plan to include reference in the new local plan to the Camden Nature Corridor as an infrastructure priority for the "Central Area" within which the three sites referred to are located. It is also proposed to include reference

to the Corridor within each of the respective site allocations and, finally, the overarching policy, NE1. This sets out how the Council will conserve and enhance Camden's natural environment.

QUESTION 10

TO THE: CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND COST OF LIVING

BY: COUNCILLOR LORNA JANE RUSSELL

The Government has recently taken the decision to means test the Winter Fuel Payment. Will the Leader of the Council please confirm:

1. How many pensioners across Camden - broken down by ward - will lose this benefit.
2. How Camden intends to help support pensioners meet the cost of energy bills this winter.

REPLY

1. There are roughly 19,000 pensioners in Camden (as of November 2023); and around 5,370 households are currently receiving Pension Credit – estimated at about 6,500 individual pensioners.

Therefore, we estimate that roughly 12,500 pensioners will no longer receive the Winter Fuel Payment in Camden. Please see table below for ward breakdowns.

2. Camden is supporting pensioners, and the wider population, with energy costs this winter through following initiatives:
 - Pension Credit Uptake Campaigns: We know there are around 400 pensioners who are eligible for, but not claiming, Pension Credit. Since 2022 Camden has worked in partnership with other London boroughs, the GLA and Age UK London to drive uptake of Pension Credit. In Camden, we have successfully halved the overall level of underclaiming, helping over 400 households claim over £1.75m a year in financial support through Pension Credit. Letters, co-branded with Age UK Camden, will be sent out during October and November, and the Council's Money Advice Camden team will make targeted phone calls to those affected.
 - Household Support Fund Proactive Campaigns: Government has extended its Household Support Fund through to March 2025, and requires Councils to ensure the funds reach pensioners every year. Camden is exploring using a portion of the Household Support Fund to target the most financially vulnerable pensioners, who do not qualify for Pension Credit.

- Cost of Living Grants: All low income pensioners, as well as low income households, are able to apply for Cost of Living grants. The Council continues to invest in one of the most generous Cost of Living funds in London, meaning that residents struggling with bills can access between £200 - £500 cash payments. The fund has paid out over £5.3m to over 18,000 households since its launch in 2022.

	Total pensioners by ward (Individuals)	Those already in receipt of Pension Credit (Households*)	Estimated number of Pensioners who will lose access to Winter Fuel Payment**
Belsize	1,230	159	1,071
Bloomsbury	939	273	666
Camden Square	577	178	399
Camden Town	436	144	292
Fortune Green	1,001	267	734
Frognal	875	79	796
Gospel Oak	1,183	382	801
Hampstead Town	1,089	94	995
Haverstock	1,144	411	733
Highgate (Camden)	1,409	221	1,188
Holborn & Covent Garden	962	325	637
Kentish Town North	602	156	446
Kentish Town South	844	275	569
Kilburn (Camden)	1,107	545	562
King's Cross	779	272	507
Primrose Hill	1,476	355	1,121
Regent's Park (Camden)	894	354	540
South Hampstead	904	196	708
St Pancras & Somers Town	893	423	470
West Hampstead	803	261	542
Total	19,147	5,370	13,777

**Many households are made up of couples rather than individuals, meaning that the true number of PC claimants is likely to be closer to 6,500*

*** The true number of pensioners losing WFP is likely to be closer to 12,500*

ENDS

