

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY, 12TH NOVEMBER, 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), Meric Apak, Joseph Ball, Tommy Gale, Eddie Hanson and Nancy Jirira and Charles Bertlin and Larissa Hope (co-opted members)

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Richard Cotton and Samata Khatoon and Victor Seedman (co-opted member)

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Sagal Abdi-Wali, Cabinet Member for 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 Councillor Richard Cotton 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 7th October 2024.

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 7th October 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

6. DEPUTATIONS

A deputation was then received from Alice Brown, Climate Emergency, regarding the Holmes Road Depot and Director Labour Force, as set out in the supplementary agenda.

Alice gave the following key responses to questions:

- The amount of work being done by the Council's Direct Labour Force and the work that was being done by contractors and sub-contractors, and whether this was changing was difficult to identify as the data wasn't publicly available. If this information was available then consideration could be given as to whether more work could and should be undertaken by the Council's Direct Labour Force. This would also help the capacity building in relation to direct labour.
- The lack of information made the Council's procurement processes a challenge to understand, but if the procurement process was made more transparent then it could be used to actively tackle the climate emergency.

The meeting asked that officers provide a response to the deputation regarding the questions they asked in their deputation statement.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management

The Chair then thanked Alice for her deputation.

7. HOUSING TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Housing which was introduced by Elly Shepherd, Head of Housing Policy, Performance and Assurance, and she along with Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, and Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The Housing Transformation programme had put in place a number of activity areas one of which was seeking to improve its data and digital services. This activity area was aiming to ensure that the data the Council held was compliant, accurate, accessible and could be used to develop insights and about services and residents. The changes that would come from this programme would also seek to enable managers to be able to monitor officer's performance and through this the service offered to tenants and residents. These changes would help improve the Council's communication flow with its tenants, residents and other public sector and third sector agencies. Staff would be supported through these changes by being given a through re-induction and training sessions that would be undertaken in January, where they would be given clarity regarding their new roles and service expectations, clear guidance on operational practice, and the tools to undertake their jobs effectively.
- The Transformation Programme Front Door activity was seeking to build on the result of the tenant's satisfaction survey, where 73% of tenants felt they were listened to and respected, in relation to improving its communication with tenants and residents (e.g. digital, phone and in-person). This activity recognised the importance of this type of contact with tenants and residents, and getting it right would go a long way in improving their views on the housing services they were receiving.
- The Council corporately was undertaking a staff survey to see how staff felt about the organisation, their managers and their own role in service provision.
- The Housing restructure had been unsettling for staff and appropriate training and listening spaces had been put in place to help them through the change process.
- The role of the housing officer had changed over the years and become more challenging, with staff having to deal with tenants with complex and challenging needs some of which now required a new set of skill sets. Here the Relational Practice model activity was seeking to address the new roles

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and skill sets that officers would require going forward. Work was still being undertaken regarding scoping the work along with whether it would be provided internally or through a contractor.

- The Housing District Management Committees would be receiving a paper on the Housing Transformation Programme at the November/December cycle of meetings. Further information would be provided to tenants and residents in Housing News and through officer walkabouts.
- The Housing Transformation Programme was not a cost driven process rather it was being taken forward due to service and regulatory requirements, any cost efficiencies arising from this programme were incidental.
- The Council was monitoring the impact that AI was having on service provision and delivery from those landlords that were seeking to use this function in their service delivery. Any positive learning from the use of AI would be considered and evaluated by the authority, and when appropriate taken forward.
- The Psychological Informed Consultation and Training Team would be providing a service directly to staff when they were dealing with complex cases and they needed to speak to someone because they may be feeling overwhelmed, or finding it challenging to deal with some of those cases. Funding for this support service would be available for the next financial year. Officers from the team would be able to train other colleagues so the support would be available to a wider group of staff.
- The trauma informed context and the Relational Practice Model had been developed in children services, and it was recognised that this model could be applied to housing service delivery as a means of understanding and working with tenants and residents who had complex and challenging needs. This approach enabled officers to understand who the person that they were working with was, where they were coming from and putting themselves in their shoes, and what relational practice did was to add on top a trauma informed lens. Officers would provide information regarding the Relational Practice Model and the staff training programme when the information was available.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing (ES)

- The whole Housing Transformation programme sought to change the culture of the service so that it provided the service provision that met the needs of tenants and residents.

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- The Asset Management Strategy would set out how the Council would be seeking to meet its housing investment gap, and the options that were available to authority to fund this programme.
- The tenant participation model would be looking at redesigning tenant participation so housing services became more resident centred and tenant led.
- The Council was making good progress in seeking to turnaround housing voids, with the average void now being let in 34 days instead of 156 days that they were a few years ago.
- Officers were working with tenants to seek to deliver the Residents Action Day programme on an annual basis.
- The Neighbourhoods Programme was seeking to roll out the service hub approach that had been piloted in Kentish Town. Services were being realigned so that staff from repairs, housing, adult social care, and children services were all in one location, so they would be able to tackle a particular complex case quickly and holistically.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted

8. NEIGHBOURHOODS- HOUSING UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Housing which was introduced by Maria Jacobs, Head of Neighbourhoods, and she along with Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, gave the following key responses to questions:

- Officers would provide an update regarding the tenancy visits once the programme was underway.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing (MJ)

- Following the end of the intensive tenant participation events, officers were mobilising the tenancy visits programme. It was recognised that the authority needed to collect a lot of information from residents that cuts across things like repairs, building safety and vulnerabilities. Officers were working with other areas in the Council also engaged with collecting information, to ensure it made the best use of its contact with tenants and residents. The new

programme would start with a cohort of tenants who were 65 and over, who have had a damp and mould visit in the previous 12 months with no further follow-up, and those who had not reported a repair in the last 12 months. These visits were also required as part of the tenancy standard issued by the Regulator for Social Housing. The programme and its outcomes would be regularly reviewed and monitored.

- The Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy covered both Council estates and public realm as a joint policy between community safety and housing. This policy now ensured that there was a single point of contact for reports of ASB. Reports received would be triaged and risk assessed, and depending on risk profile, assigned to the most appropriate officer to lead and investigate. This could be the Community Safety Officer (if high risk) or Neighbourhood Housing Officer. The investigating officer would ensure an action plan was agreed along with a communication strategy, to ensure that victims of ASB were clear on who they contact and when they could expect to hear from the Council on progress. The Safer Neighbourhoods Team within the Metropolitan Police Service were responsible for any criminal activity within the borough, and the Council worked in partnership with them to use any powers it had as a local authority to manage and deal with anti-social behaviours that had an impact on residents lives.
- The Council would be considering the lessons learnt from the first phase of the Traffic Management Orders (TMO) that were being put in place to deal with estate parking issues. The scheme required the Council to follow an intensive and specific consultation process, some of which could be improved upon going forward. Now that the Council was at the installation stage it was expected that tenants and residents would see a significant difference on those estates with a TMO in place, in terms of access for emergency vehicles, along with allowing its tenants and residents to park lawfully on its estates. Revenue from any parking penalty notices collected would be used to fund appropriate enforcement processes.
- The Council was reviewing its digital offer and this would include making it easier for residents to send information in various formats, that would link directly to the Council's case management system to enable officers to respond and act quickly.
- The re-induction programme taking place in January would provide the authority with an opportunity to change the culture of staff, so that they met the expectations of the new service along with the Council's tenants and residents. Progress was already being made in this area, with complimentary

evidence coming through of service and officer improvements that showed the approach was the right one.

- Housing officers were working with colleagues in adult social care and health to seek to put in place preventative methods to avoid issues becoming a crisis in the future.
- The ASB Policy had built in a 3 year review programme but this could be reviewed sooner if necessary. Also the policy made a clear commitment to provide for early intervention as an important mechanism for resolving disputes.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted

9. UPDATE ON THE ROUGH SLEEPING REVIEW

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Housing which was introduced by Simone Melia, Head of Housing Solutions, and she along with Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The Council's outreach team for rough sleepers worked closely with rough sleepers and would assist help them in navigating through the administrative processes so that they could access appropriate support. This had been helped following the restructuring of the services with the Rough Sleeping Team and the Statutory Homelessness Team now reporting to the Head of Housing Solutions. The service also ensured that rough sleepers who did not have a local connection to Camden were connected with their home authority, to enable them to access appropriate support.
- Housing services and public health were working together to ensure that anyone presenting as homeless would be integrated into the system and navigated through to access appropriate support. This was being led by the Council's previous Rough Sleeping Commissioner who was now leading the Homelessness Integration programme in public health.
- Staff within the service would be receiving psychologically informed training so that they were better able to fully meet all the needs of people who presented as homeless. Appropriate performance measures would be put in place to ensure that staff provided the expected level of service when dealing with a case.

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- The personal pilot initiative was still being developed by the co-production group, though proposals arising from this initiative were already being taken forward in some of the hostels that were being used. Sharing data was still a challenge as systems were still not in place that enabled this to be done easily, but the Council was working with some of its providers to pilot approaches that enabled this sharing of information to work better.
- As part of the Council's approach to dealing with Domestic Violence, when a person presented as homeless due to Domestic Violence then a casework officer in the Homelessness Team would also assist them, and jointly co-produce the shared risk assessment. This would mean the case information would only need to be inputted once.
- Officers would ensure that information on the Cold Weather Shelter initiative was shared with rough sleepers and agencies working with rough sleepers so that they were aware of this initiative.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing (SM)

- The Rough Sleeping Forum was being revived to ensure that it was now being led by the voluntary sector but with the Council and NHS as equal partners working together to tackle homelessness. The organisations involved would be asked at the first meeting of the forum, to identify any other groups or agencies that they felt needed to be included in the work of the forum.
- The Adult Social Care and Homelessness Steering Group oversaw the work being done to evaluate and assess the health offer to those people who were rough sleeping. As part of this work, two social workers would be working with housing officers to help people who were being faced with becoming homeless and they would also help undertake Care Act Assessments.
- The Co-production Group was a group that was created as part of that homelessness system integration work and it would be used as a sounding board to seek the views of rough sleepers for example on the rough sleeping review.
- The funding obtained from the Housing First Initiative would enable the authority to create 30 new units of accommodation for homeless people. This was a joint initiative being run with Nothing Hill Housing Association with both the Council and the housing association acquiring 10 properties each, with the Council then bringing back 10 voids to use for this purpose.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted

**10. UPDATE ON THE HOMELESS SCRUTINY PANEL ACTIONS:
VOLUNTARY COMMUNITY SECTOR PROVISION AND OUT OF HOURS
PROVISION TO SUPPORT SERVICE DELIVERY**

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Housing which was introduced by Simone Melia, Head of Housing Solutions, and she gave the following key responses to questions:

- A number of the voluntary and community sector organisations did provide support to communities in the West Hampstead and Kilburn areas.
- The Camden Advice Network (CAN) was the umbrella organisation that covered the voluntary sector agencies that provided support to communities in the borough. The CAN was not commissioned by housing, and the 7 year funding arrangement was to enable these organisations to have a clear funding stream in place so that they had security going forward. Officers would be discussing with the commissioning service the role housing could play in any review of the performance of the agencies and voluntary sector organisations that made up CAN, along with the future commissioning process.
- The Homeless Service had been piloting an in-house out-of-hours provision with Contact Camden. This pilot had an initial review and officers would determine when to fully take forward the statutory compliant service in the medium-term.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted

11. UPDATE FROM CABINET MEMBER FOR BETTER HOMES

Report of the Cabinet Member for Better Homes

Councillor Sagal Abdi-Wali, Cabinet Member for Better Homes, took the meeting through the report and she along with Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing and Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, gave the following key responses to questions;

- Monitoring and improving service and officer performance was an integral part of the Housing Transformation programme. Training and guidance were being

given to staff along with clarity on service expectations. KPIs were being used to identify service goals, and these were already having an impact in areas like rent collection with rent arrears now running at 2% down from a high of 24%, and rent collection now running above the 99% target.

- The service did operate a rent first model, but officers were expected to undertake this role in an informative and supportive way. This approach would include officers going out visiting tenants in or about to be in rent arrears to see how they could be supported and understand tenants specific circumstances, along with providing guidance on where they could access additional support (e.g. discretionary housing grant). Officer's job descriptions had been revised to ensure that this approach was enshrined in their ways of working.
- Officers would provide information regarding the family friendly acquisition programme in relation to the number of bedrooms gained from this programme.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (GH)

- The Council was setting up a Temporary Accommodation Taskforce to deal with the need for this type of accommodation. The Council was reducing its reliance on commercial hotels, and was aiming to be no longer using commercial hotels by the end of next month. The Council would instead be using any property that became available to use for this purpose as the aim was to keep people in Camden, or as close to Camden as possible. The work of the Task Force would also have a preventative dimension where it would look at ways to seek to avoid people needing to access temporary accommodation.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

12. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

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

The scrutiny committee noted that the following changes to the work programme, along with the further information required regarding items:

- Asset Management Strategy (Cabinet Report) would now be going to the January 2025 meeting rather than the December 2024 meeting.
- Cabinet Member report (January) would focus on leaseholder services
- Landlord Licensing Scheme (February 2025)

Programme of meetings 2024/25 (new items and information requests in bold)

10th December

- Procurement Strategy for a Retrofit at Scale Pilot (Cabinet Report)
- Allocations Policy Report
- HRA Budgeting Report
- Insight, Learning and Impact Report (Quarter 2 2024/5)
- Response to the Council Themed Debate on the Private Rented Sector
- Work Programme

13th January 2025

- **Asset Management Strategy (Cabinet Report)**
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
- HRA Budget & Rent Review 24/25
- CIP annual report
- Domestic Abuse Report Update
- Cabinet Member Better Homes update
- Work Programme

25th February

- Housing Associations Annual Performance Report
- Cabinet Member Better Homes Annual Report
- **Landlord Licensing Scheme**
- Work programme

Yet to be programmed

- TSM Housing Regulator update
- Housing Ombudsman report on the Council

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 9.15 pm.

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CHAIR

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MINUTES END