

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **MONDAY, 13TH JANUARY, 2025** 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, Richard Cotton, Tommy Gale, Eddie Hanson and Nancy Jirira and Charles Bertlin, Larissa Hope and Victor Seedman (co-opted members)

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillor Samata Khatoon

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Sagal Abdi-Wali, Cabinet Member for Better Homes
Councillors Anna Buragge and Lorna Greenwood for item 11

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

There were none.

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 10th December 2024.

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 10th December 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

6. DEPUTATIONS

There were none.

7. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S ADDITIONAL HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION LICENSING SCHEME AND PROPOSAL TO CONSULT ON RENEWAL OF SCHEME

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

Darren Wilsher, Private Sector Housing Service Manager, took the meeting through the report and gave the following key responses to questions:

- The Council was still seeking to obtain the robust evidence and data to support the potential introduction of a selective licensing scheme, as part of the requirement was to demonstrate the need to tackle one of the various issues that a scheme would be required to deal with e.g. poor property conditions or anti-social behaviour. It was expected that the commissioning process to appoint a research establishment to undertake this work would be done during the course of the year. The outcome from this work would be reported to members when it was available.
- Once the work had been undertaken, consultation undertaken and approval given then the outcomes would no longer require the approval of the Secretary of State so they could be implemented at that point.

Housing Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 13th January, 2025

- Licensing Schemes would continue to play an important role in seeking to raise standards for landlords and tenants alike, and proposals like Property MOTs would not be replacing current tools such as HMO and selective licensing schemes.
- The Licensing scheme sets out the minimum standards to be achieved by a landlord, along with these standards there were management regulations some of which covered waste provision. Waste Management issues were something that would be picked up with landlords as part of targeted compliance inspections. Members could identify and refer properties that were not meeting the required standards to officer to investigate. Where landlords were not meeting these requirements then enforcement action would be taken against them, whether that was through issuing civil penalty notices, formal enforcement or prosecution through the courts. Landlords were always advised that they should ensure that their tenants understood how to live responsibly along with how to undertake basic requirements such as when to place rubbish out for collection.
- Officers worked with colleagues in environmental services to pick up issues regarding reported community and environmental concerns. This could provide information regarding poor compliance and un-licensed properties so officers in the team could undertake appropriate action.
- Nationally there was a shortage of environmental health professionals and the service had put in place proposals that would help it develop and support new staff through a new 1-year Diploma. This approach had enabled 4 members of staff to come through the programme this year, with a further 3 coming through next year.
- The Council was expecting to have in place a new on-line processing and payment system for HMO licensing by March this year.
- Licence conditions were tailored for each property and landlords were expected to meet these requirements. Prior to renewing a licence checks were completed to determine whether work identified had been completed by landlords and compliance with licence conditions generally, with non-compliant landlords being only issued with a 1 year licence so as to encourage them to complete the works. So far 331 1-year licences had been issued. The 1-year licence cost landlords the same amount as the cost of the 5-year licence, so failure to comply had a penalty attached. Civil penalty notices would also be issued to landlords, even if they had a licence, in order for them to undertake the required actions. Landlords and agents had been issued with £2M in civil penalty notices during the current designation for various licensing failings. Officers would target inspections towards high risk properties, and on the properties of those landlords who had failed to comply on undertaking works on another home. Information on this approach was shared with landlords at regular forums and in the landlord's newsletter.
- Information on the licensing scheme and the support available to private rented sector tenants and landlords from the Council, other agencies and the Camden Federation of Private Sector Tenants was available on the Council's website.

The Housing Scrutiny Committee welcomed the proposals in the report.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

**8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET AND RENT REVIEW
2025/26**

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

The meeting was advised that the views of the Housing District Management Committees regarding the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget setting proposals, had been circulated to members as part of the supplementary agenda.

Michael Webb, Head of Finance (Supporting Communities), took the meeting through the report and he along with Councillor Sagal Abdi-Wali, Cabinet Member for Better Homes, Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The proposed housing rental and service charge increases would ensure that all the inflationary pressures within housing services were being met rather than funding an increase in service provision. The Housing Investment Strategy and the Housing Transformation programme would be the key driving mechanisms designed to improve the Council's housing infrastructure and tenant's experience of service provision.
- The Council was proposing to undertake a review of all services and contracts to ensure that all inflationary pressures were being met wherever possible from existing resources. Should gaps be identified as part of this review process then this would be picked up in the budgetary process for 2026/27.
- Officers would be considering other ways of securing resources to ensure services were fully funded, de-pooling service charges had been a way of meeting this need in the past and, should it prove necessary, this could be undertaken again in the areas left where it could be done.
- In delivering the proposed HRA budget proposals officers undertook a thorough review of income and expenditure to see where savings could be made. This process identified efficiency savings that recognised some services could be delivered and resources spent differently. Some of the savings proposals recognised that trade-offs had to be made regarding service provision, and this would be in the area of discretionary services e.g. communal repairs.
- The Council was not able to do everything that tenants may want it to undertake on their behalf. Here though the Council had sought to empower tenants with information that would help them do things that they could do themselves e.g. through helpful videos of how to do some minor household tasks such as unblocking sinks and how to keep damp and mould at bay.

Housing Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 13th January, 2025

- The Hampstead DMC had voted in favour of the proposed increase in rents as they had recognised the need to fully fund services, and they had felt that the Transformation Programme had begun to make service improvements.
- The Housing Investment Strategy sought to identify how the proposed Housing Asset Management Strategy, which included a large cyclical maintenance programme would be funded over the next five years.
- A contract procurement process would be undertaken from April this year which would seek an improved level of contractor performance for M&E services such as heating and lifts, delivered through new contracts from 2026 onwards.
- Some homes would need to receive regular damp and mould support due to the fabric of the building, and the authority would need to consider the most appropriate way forward for these homes.
- The new customer relationship management system would ensure that issues were being picked up and dealt with by the appropriate officers as and when necessary.
- Officers would provide an update regarding the changes to estate management budget.

ACTION BY: Director of Finance (MW)

- The Income Maximisation Team (old Housing Welfare Rights Team) had been very successful in improving rental collection income and dealing with rent arrears, even after the further roll out of Universal Credit towards tenants. The Income Maximisation Team had a clear focus of maximising rental income, and they would support tenants in seeking all the benefits and other support that would enable them to continue paying their rent and any arrears.
- Some Council homes could not disengage themselves from a 'bulk gas' supply as the pipework was proved by the authority rather than the national grid. These homes therefore had to obtain their gas supply from the Council.

The meeting felt it was important that the Council ensured that the messaging around why rents and service charges were going up going was made clear to tenant's and residents. This could be done using some of the charts and graphs that had been included in the report.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

9. HOUSING INVESTMENT STRATEGY

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

Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, took the meeting through the report and he along with Councillor Sagal Abdi-Wali, Cabinet Member for Better

Housing Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 13th January, 2025

Homes and Sinead Burke, Head of Property Asset Management, gave the following key responses to questions:

- At the DMC meetings on 8th January 2025 the DMCs, especially Hampstead DMC, understood the need for the Council to have a comprehensive approach to tackling its housing investment needs that would involve the sale of a number of poorly performing properties.
- The Council would continue to work with and put the arguments to the government regarding the need to fund social housing's investment need.
- The Housing Investment Strategy put in place a 5 year programme and sought to fund the Housing Asset Management Strategy of the Council. The programme would allow the Council to dispose of up to 60 poorly performing properties during the course of a year if necessary.
- Each poorly performing property identified would have to go through a rigorous process before it was determined to go ahead with the disposal.
- The Council had been working through and embedding the improvements recommended by Councillor Slater regarding Leaseholder Services. Leaseholders were also being given opportunities throughout any contract procurement and works programme to give their views on the respective arrangements. Leaseholders were only charged for the specific works that had been undertaken.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

10. HOUSING AND DOMESTIC ABUSE: PROGRESS REPORT

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

Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, took the meeting through the report along with Simone Melia, Head of Housing Solutions (Also Domestic Abuse Lead for Housing), Hannah Slydel, Senior Policy Officer, and Caroline Bialobrzycka, Violence against Women and Girls Principal Policy and Projects Officer, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The policy, handbook, and training programme would provide housing staff with the assessment skills and tools needed to recognise not just physical abuse, but all forms of Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) including coercive control. This included indicators that could mean that a person was suffering domestic abuse or violence e.g. anti-social behaviour complaints, a person being made homeless or at risk of being made homeless being possible indicators.
- It was expected that once the Resident-facing Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and the 'Know your rights' Survivors' Housing and Domestic Abuse handbook was launched this year that there would be an increase in the

number of case referrals. The case referral process and the number of staff undertaking the Level 1 to Level 3 DVA training programmes, was underpinned by a case management and oversight systems that included DVA Dashboards that allowed for the effective monitoring of cases and monthly reporting to DVA working groups. The Dashboard would be used to monitor access points in relation to case referrals that could be cross-referenced to the training undertaken to see the effectiveness of the process. The policy and the handbook would be supported by an effective communication campaign that places the information in accessible places including the Council's website. To increase accessibility the domestic abuse and housing overview pages of the handbook had been translated into the six key community languages as well as an in an Easy-read format.

- All Camden staff had to undertake mandatory Domestic Violence and Abuse training. This was further enhanced by compulsory level one to three domestic abuse training for core housing teams, and bespoke training for teams such as caretakers and repairs staff.
- The 'Know your rights' Survivors' DVA handbook had been co-produced by people with lived-experience of domestic abuse, homelessness and housing insecurity. The Policy and Handbook were developed in consultation with external partners, including specialists along with internal staff teams. Officers would continue working in partnership with these agencies on this issue, and as part of this they were developing a learning offer for partner organisations to equip their staff with an understanding of domestic abuse, the housing laws that applied and had knowledge on how to navigate the Council's processes, procedures and along with appropriate contacts. The Council continued to fund Community and Voluntary Sector organisation through appropriate funding streams.
- Domestic abuse expertise has been embedded into housing services through two new specialist Domestic Abuse Complex Case Co-ordinator (Neighbourhoods) roles. Also, the Homelessness Team had 2 Domestic Abuse Homelessness Advisors in place to advise on issues that arose. Housing Services would be looking to appoint domestic abuse champions within the service to help provide advice and support.
- The procedures underpinning the policy were launched before the policy in order that the framework could be tested to see that it was fit for purpose. Relevant teams had service specific procedures as each team had different issues that needed to be covered.
- Officers would provide an update regarding the effectiveness of the initiatives and its impacts on under-represented groups, along with other measures could be considered going forward.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing (CB)

- The 'Know you're not Alone' community-wide domestic abuse awareness campaign was launched on White Ribbon day, as part of 16 days of activism that included sessions with the voluntary and charity sectors and staff across different sites in the borough. Campaign materials were also distributed to

Housing Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 13th January, 2025

resident networks and the Housing District Management Committees microsites.

- DVA impacted people of all genders and disproportionately impacted women and the Transgender community. Campaign materials and communications had been developed to represent the diversity of Camden and groups that were at an increased risk of domestic abuse, as well as marginalised and under-represented groups. An intersectional approach to DVA was integrated into the training programme that was being delivered.

The Housing Scrutiny Committee welcomed the report, the draft handbook and the work that had been undertaken to take this initiative forward that had been led by ex-councillor Angela Mason. The meeting also hoped that the approaches and practices that had been developed as part of this initiative could be taken through into other areas of housing services.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

11. HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME REVIEW

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

Gerry Crowley, Head of Allocations, Lettings and Private Housing Services, took the meeting through the report and he along with Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, gave the following key responses to questions:

Councillors Anna Burrage and Lorna Greenwood were also in attendance for this item.

- The Council was focused on maximising any and every opportunity to downsize and free up the supply of bedrooms and family size properties. The current allocations policy allows a tenant to downsize to their assessed level of need. Should a tenant be of state pension age then they were allowed to downsize to their assessed level of need plus a spare bedroom. The revised scheme would now allow for households seeking to downsize to be able to bid for a property which was one bedroom larger than their assessed requirements. This new approach would be promoted widely to ensure that as many tenants as possible were able to downsize, and free up larger homes for families in need.
- Improvements would also be made regarding the offers and viewing processes and, once the way forward had been determined, then these proposals would go through the appropriate governance processes, and consultation before they could be implemented.
- The Housing and Medical Points Assessment target was being increased to 28 days as it was felt it better reflected its achievability. This process was

Housing Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 13th January, 2025

often very complex and required the input from a number of sources, and the failure to make the assessment within the target led to the applicant feeling distressed. The 28 day target would allow for a more accurate deadline and the better management of the tenant's expectations. The process itself was also going to be reviewed as currently points were awarded then taken away, again distressing the applicant leading to complaints being made.

- Officers would be reviewing the Additional Support Needs criteria to allow for further flexibility, especially around when tenants had rent arrears but had signed up to repayment agreements and were adhering to them.
- Adult Social Care Services had proposed that the annual housing quota be increased to 20 properties for adults with learning disabilities so they can live independently, and allow the best opportunity to fully utilize the number of properties. A review process would be built in the scheme to ensure that it was working as expected.
- The Council and other services would continue to work together to try and ensure that adults with learning disabilities who were allocated a home as part of the annual housing quota, were fully supported in their homes so that they received the outcomes they desired.
- Officers would be looking at putting in place a mechanism to allow for the consideration of exceptional cases.
- Officers would share the proposed draft bereavement family protocol when it was available.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing (GC)

- Officer would also be considering whether the review stage processes could be condensed into a 1 stage process.
- The proposed major changes to the Housing Allocations Scheme would be submitted to the scrutiny committee for consideration at its July 2025 meeting.

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:

- Housing Ombudsman report was now to be considered at an Extra-Ordinary meeting of the Council on the 20th January 2025, and whether the report would now be considered by the scrutiny committee would be subject to the outcomes from that meeting.
- Use of AI to improve Housing Services (July)

Housing Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 13th January, 2025

- Housing Allocation Scheme major changes (July)

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

25th February

- Housing Associations Annual Performance Report
- Housing Ombudsman report (**Subject to the outcome from the Extra-Ordinary Council meeting**)
- Cabinet Member Better Homes Annual Report
- CIP annual report
- Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (Cabinet Member report)
- Work programme

Yet to be programmed

- **AI – Improving Housing Services (July)**
- **Housing Allocation Scheme major changes (July)**

The meeting noted that an informal work programme discussion would be held in approximately June 2025 to discuss developing the scrutiny committee's draft work programme for the year.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report work programme be revised as outlined above.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There were none.

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm.

CHAIR

Contact Officer: Gianni Franchi

Telephone No: 020 7974 1914

E-Mail: gianni.franchi@camden.gov.uk

MINUTES END