

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY, 25TH FEBRUARY, 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), 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

Councillors Meric Apak and Samata Khatoon

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Richard Olszewski, Leader of the Council (item 9)
Counillor Pat Callghan, Deputy Leader of the Council (item 9)
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 Councillors Meric Apak and Samata Khatoon. Councillor Lorraine Revah was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Khatoon for this meeting.

Also apologies for lateness was given by Councillor Eddie Hanson.

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 13th January 2025.

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 13th January 2025 be approved and signed as a correct record.

6. DEPUTATIONS

A deputation was then received from Paul Tomlinson, regarding the Housing Ombudsman report, as set out in the supplementary agenda.

Paul Tomlinson gave the following key responses to questions:

- Housing Services needed to do more to help vulnerable tenants and tenants with disabilities. Staff were not properly trained to understand their needs nor know the best way to help them. The Housing Scrutiny Committee could focus some of its time to seek to challenge and address this concern at a future meeting.
- The authority needed to show leadership and give clear direction to Housing Services to ensure that the transformation programme worked and delivered clear service improvements.

The Chair then thanked Paul Tomlinson for his deputation.

7. COMMUNITY INVESTMENT PROGRAMME (CIP) ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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

Councillor Nasrine Djemai, Cabinet Member for New Homes and Community Investment, took the meeting through the report and she along with Neil Vokes, Director of Development, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The Chester Road scheme was expected to be delivered by 2026, the building works had now started and should be completed by then.
- Engagement had been undertaken by the developer with the community regarding the Bacton Phase 2 development, along with having an ongoing dialogue with the Council. Should councillors have evidence of complaints from tenants and residents about the developer then Councillor Djemai would be willing to take them up with the developer directly.

ACTION BY: All Members of the Committee

- In seeking to meet the Council's aim of reaching net zero in relation to CIP developments, the Council worked within the requirements of the London Plan. Here the Council did whole life cycle carbon assessments, test and measure air quality and the best example of the Council already overachieving on this was the Agar Grove development. Here the homes were built to Passive House Standard, which was in excess of the London Plan requirements and meant residents energy bills were 70% less than they were previously. This was purely through the quality of build of the homes, the fabric of the buildings and the Passive House guarantee. Officers were considering whether the Passive House standard principles should be rolled out across future schemes, so tenants could get the benefit of reduced energy bills.
- The requirements arising from the Building Safety regulatory framework was now having an impact on the materials that could be used in the building of high rise homes, which meant the use of timber for high rise buildings was much more difficult to take forward at the moment. The Building Safety Act was also leading to changes now being required around the design of homes, which included needing to have 2 staircases for high rise buildings.
- All new builds were now being fitted with heat pumps as per the latest scheme at Maitland Park.
- All homes were being built in line with the London plan, which had very set building standards and these new builds tended to be bigger than what they were replacing including the floor space of rooms.
- The Council was still one of the largest in terms of house builders across the country, especially now that some authorities had scaled back housing delivery programmes due to financial pressures.
- The Council's multi-phase approach to housing delivery meant that the first phase built homes for social rent, this enabled residents to have a single

move into their new home first. Once the first phase had been completed then the later phases would provide the funds to pay for the affordable homes that were already delivered.

- The Council controlling the development programme meant if more money became available, it would change private sale to affordable as the main principal driving CIP was to deliver as much genuinely affordable housing as possible and private sales currently enabled this to take place.
- Small sites tended to be very complicated sites to deliver housing on. There was a risk that local authorities may see small sites programmes as an easy solution because, there was no demolition of existing homes. Small sites schemes though required really extensive engagement with the local community, because the scheme would require the building of homes in and amongst existing homes. Also, the schemes that had been done in Camden had been really complicated, and more expensive per home to undertake than sites where the whole estate was demolished or cleared.
- Clerks of works were now in place for all schemes to ensure the quality of works and that they were being delivered to a consistent standard. They had been put in place, along with having an aftercare team for either 12 or 24 months after completion to deal with any issues arising for tenants and residents. These initiatives had arisen after learning lessons from previous developments.
- Officers would provide information regarding the number of homes sold and rebuilt and the net build regarding the types of homes that had been built over the course of CIP; along with the number that were replacement homes; details of the way the Council followed the GLA's requirement to produce a Whole Life Carbon assessment; an update on the Wendling & St. Stephen Close Regeneration Scheme; the best way to recognise the varied community that live on the Camden Road site; and the comparative data on where the Council was in relation to the national picture and against London Boroughs regarding affordable housing delivery.

ACTION BY: Director of Development

- Officer agreed to include the social value benefits accruing from CIP developments in future CIP annual reports.

ACTION BY: Director of Development

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

8. HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

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

Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, took the meeting through the report and she along with Rizwan Siddiqui, Policy and Performance Co-ordinator, along with representatives of Riverside, Origin Housing, Notting Hill Genesis and Clarion Housing Associations, gave the following key responses to questions:

- In relation to the high number of Damp and Mould Cases for Clarion Housing Association in comparison to last year, the housing association reported its system now categorised all cases as Category 1 cases. The service had set up a single point of contact team to ensure cases were being dealt with specific and action plans undertaken and delivered (188 jobs completed to date). When necessary tenants would be moved to enable any works to be undertaken to fix the issue. Officers agreed to provide a breakdown of the Category 1 and 2 cases for Clarion.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing (RS)

- The Housing Associations all sought to ensure that complaints were dealt with appropriately and within the required timescales. This would be undertaken by either national or local complaints teams. Complaints mainly related to repairs performance (quality and the time taken for them to be actioned). Different approaches were being undertaken to ensure that repairs were being delivered well and in a timely manner, along with ensuring that when this hadn't happened the complaints teams dealt with the complaint effectively. Also when necessary appropriate learning regarding the individual repair or the complaint was undertaken to ensure that any learning was shared to ensure that they avoided the issue reoccurring. Further work was on-going to ensure that all parts of this process were improved as it was recognised that they weren't working effectively.
- Arlington House was a provider of social housing for people with highly complex needs and officers there working with representatives of Camden Council to help support tenants on a daily basis. Members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee could contact the Riverside Housing Association to come and visit the premises to see the good work that was being undertaken there.

ACTION BY: Members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee

- Resources were available to fund day-to day repairs for tenants and residents and this covered support for tenants who were vulnerable or had a disability. Planned preventative or capital works were though restricted by the amount of resources that the housing association had to fund these type of schemes. Repairs services all had issues regarding recruiting and retaining good quality staff who were able to meet the increased demands of tenants. Tenants were also encouraged to identify their respective needs so that the housing association could log this information, and the data could be shared with operatives so that they understood the needs to the tenant when undertaking work in their home. Data surrounding repairs was monitored so that the

information could be used to help shape service improvements, along with ensuring that the individual tenant was satisfied with the work that was undertaken.

- Clarion Housing Association had a number of hard to let unit units that had impacted upon their average voids turnaround time. Also since last year they had remodelled the service so that most of the work had now been undertaken by an in-house team which had greatly improved the turnaround time. It was expected that this would be reflected in next year's average turnaround figures.
- Officers agreed to provide further data in relation to some of the smaller housing associations operating in the borough in next year's annual report and invite them to the Housing Scrutiny Committee when the annual report was to be discussed.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing (RS)

- The proceeds from the sale of homes in London were reinvested into remaining London homes to improve the quality of their homes, along with development schemes building new homes in the borough or elsewhere in London.
- Housing Associations were taking a more robust approach to dealing with tenants who had undertaken anti-social behaviour, which could lead to them being permanently evicted from their home if their behaviour did not improve, this information would again be reflected in next year's report to the scrutiny committee.
- Housing Associations undertake annual analysis of the age of their tenants which was undertaken through existing information on the system or self-reporting from tenants or housing officers. Data was also included regarding tenants who were vulnerable or had a disability

The Chair then thanked the housing associations for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

9. HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SPECIAL INVESTIGATION INTO LONDON BOROUGH OF (LB) CAMDEN – UPDATE AND ACTION PLAN

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

Gillian Marston, Executive Director Supporting Communities, took the meeting through the report and she along with Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, and Scot Reid, Head of Property Customer Services & Engagement, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The Housing Ombudsman had found that properties in London suffered from many common issues of concern to tenants and residents e.g. damp and mould, overcrowding, lack of resources to undertake repairs and planned maintenance all of which had been exacerbated by the fabric of the housing stock which on average was approximately 74 years old in Camden. All these types of factors had led to an increase in complaints across London. Camden was seeking to address these issues in a strategic way through the development of its new Housing Investment Strategy, as well as making changes to its complaints handling processes.
- Complaints had risen across London with Camden seeing a threefold increase over the last few years, many of which were highly complex. Staff numbers dealing with complaints had been increased along with putting in better processes to ensure that the concerns raised by tenants and residents were fully addressed. Extensive training based around the Housing Ombudsman's guidance had been provided to staff, as well as relational practice support. Also better performance data, through having a better case management system, and learning processes were in place to help improve service performance and delivery. All of these mechanisms would ensure that a stronger process was in place to meet tenants and resident's needs.
- Officers were working with tenants and residents through the Customer Experience Oversight Panel and the Housing and Property Residents Panel to develop guidance for staff surrounding standard operating procedures. This would include changes to the compensation policy, along with responding to complainants in an empathetic way.
- Officers agreed to provide a summary of the resources that were being put in place to support the work that was being undertaken in this area.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (SR)

- Complaints handling in housing services was now aligned with the Housing Ombudsman's expectations, with complaints being acknowledged, then the service having 10 days to provide a response that fully addressed the nature of the complaint. Following the issuing of the response the complainant was contacted by the Council's independent provider called 'KWEST' to check whether they felt the Council had addressed the points in the complaint. This proactive approach had led to a reduction in damp and mould complaints, along with Stage 2 complaints. Specifics regarding this would be shared with the Housing Ombudsman when officers were to meet with them next month.
- It was expected that all the targets set would be met by the Council, as a lot of work had already been undertaken following an internal audit report that had been commissioned which had been reinforced by the Housing Ombudsman's report. The Customer Experience Oversight Panel (which was made up of councillors/officers and tenants and residents, some of whom were DMC representatives) was also keeping a watching brief regarding performance delivery of the targets that had been set. The panel had considered the Housing Ombudsman report and helped shaped the action plan response,

along with undertaking specific work around the new compensation policy or holding contractors to account regarding performance. Information regarding the workings of the panels was available on the Council's website.

- Customer satisfaction data was provided as part of the ward councillor updates that were provided on a monthly basis.
- As the Housing Ombudsman was content with the progress the Council had made a further update in 6 month's time would provide the scrutiny committee with a good timescale in which to track progress.
- A new IT system had been put in place to help better manage the information flow for all stages of the repairs process. This system would provide information regarding previous disrepair cases to identify any links between issues, record visit outcomes and to ensure teams had access to information when needed. A small number of jobs had had appointments cancelled as part of the transition to the new system but they had all been picked up and new appointments made.
- Officers would be attending the Disability Oversight Panel on 5th March when it was considering the paper on the Housing and Property Vulnerability Policy.
- Officers asked member of the scrutiny committee to forward them with any details of repair job cases that the system had lost, along with damp and mould case reports not being given to the tenant or resident at the time of the inspection.

ACTION BY: Members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee

- The Housing Repairs Contact Centre handled 275,000 customer contacts over the course of the year half were telephone calls half were online. The telephone service was there for those who were unable or unwilling to use the online facilities. The online process did allow the tenant or resident to upload pictures of the issue which could aid the repair process.

The Housing Scrutiny Committee noted the issues and concerns raised in the special Investigation undertaken by the Housing Ombudsman into Camden's high level of findings of severe maladministration regarding cases involving repairs and/or complaints handling. The meeting supported the open and transparent way that the Council had engaged with the Housing Ombudsman and welcomed the improvements that had been put in place as outlined in the action plan. The scrutiny committee felt that it should continue monitoring the improvement plan and would be requesting an update report on progress at its July meeting that would include information on the work of the panels.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

10. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR BETTER HOMES

Consideration was given to the 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 Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management gave the following key responses to questions:

- Issues for Private Rented Sector Tenants were an issue of concern for the Council, some of which had been addressed at the full Council debate and subsequent reports on the subject last year. The Private Rented Sector Team had put in place ward surgeries for private rented sector tenants that would hopefully help support them when issues arose.
- The Peckwater Estate sports pitch refurbishment scheme was an example of the Council working with Arsenal Football Club and Adidas to help tackle the causes of youth violence by providing safe spaces and opportunities for young people. This was a residence led initiative and a good example of the Council working with its communities and its partners across the borough and some neighbouring boroughs. The scheme would provide valuable learning that could be applied to the Youth and Estates Mission and would help shape similar tenant led participation programmes going forward.
- The role of the Neighbourhood Officer had changed and it was no longer expected that they would be office based and answering phone calls or emails. They were now expected to undertake a number of different roles which would often mean that they were out and about in the local community dealing with issues on the ground. Processes were in place to enable tenants and residents to be able to contact them through appropriate channels.
- The Housing and Repairs Participation Redesign proposals outlined the proposed approach for participation, alongside plans for a proposed redesign of the Tenant Participation and Consultation and Engagement teams into a unified service, organised according to the five Neighbourhoods, with each responsible for supporting the Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs) and affiliated District Management Committee (DMC). The aim of this redesign was to better deliver regulatory standards and new participation approaches, ensuring everyone in Camden-managed homes could become an active resident, and their voices were close to decision-making.
- Officers agreed to provide information on the Traffic Management Orders impact on Sheltered Housing blocks parking arrangements; sheltered housing void works average costs; and an update information on the Weddington Road Estate works.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing/Director of Property Management

Councillor Abdi-Wali agreed that she would provide a response to written questions received from Councillors, as the meeting had not enough time to allow for all questions to be asked.

ACTION BY: All Members of the Committee

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

11. WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

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

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

- Housing Ombudsman recommendations update report, to include information on the work of the Complaints Improvement Panel (July)
- Right-to-Buy sales, impact on the Council

Programme of meetings 2025/26 (new items and information requests in bold)

Yet to be programmed

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

Members of the Scrutiny Committee were asked to identify any further items that they would like to see included in the draft work programme for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

ACTION BY: All Members of the Committee

The scrutiny committee also recommended that Charles Bertlin, Larissa Hope and Vic Seedman be reappointed as Co-opted Members for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

RESOLVED –

1. THAT the report work programme be revised as outlined above.
2. THAT Charles Bertlin, Larissa Hope and Vic Seedman be recommended for reappointment as Co-opted Members for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There were none.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END