

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **TUESDAY, 15TH JULY, 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 and Nancy Jirira and Charles Bertlin and Victor Seedman (co-opted members)

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Tommy Gale, Eddie Hanson and Samata Khatoon and Larissa Hope (co-opted member)

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Sagal Abdi-Wali, Cabinet Member for Better Homes
Councillor Pat Callaghan, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities (items 9 and 10)

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 Tommy Gale and Samata Khatoon.

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 25th February 2025.

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 25th February 2025 be approved and signed as a correct record.

6. DEPUTATIONS

There were none.

7. TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED

THAT the terms of reference of the scrutiny committee as set out below be approved;

‘To scrutinise the Council’s policies and the provision, planning, financing, management and performance of services relating to housing provided by the Supporting Communities Directorate and other service providers’.

8. APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS

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

RESOLVED -

THAT Charles Bertlin, Larissa Hope and Vic Seedman be reappointed as Co-opted Members for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

9. PROCUREMENT STRATEGY FOR THE CAMDEN ROUGH SLEEPING OUTREACH SERVICE (FORMERLY ROUTES OFF THE STREETS)

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Member for Safer Communities

The meeting determined to discuss the Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 -2030 at the same time as this report.

Councillor Pat Callaghan, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, took the meeting through the report and Osian Jones, Director of Strategy, Design and Insight, took the meeting through the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 – 30, and they along with Councillor Sagal Abdi-Wali, Cabinet Member for Better Homes, Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, and Simone Melia, Head of Housing Solutions, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The repeal of the Vagrancy Act would not in practice reduce the Council's enforcement abilities as it would still have access to anti-social behaviour powers to move someone on or take other actions. However, the Council had always come from the standpoint of offering support, accommodation, and of being there for someone if they needed that help and support. It was though recognised that not everybody accepted that support, and the Council would continue to work with individuals to encourage them to take up the support that was available.
- Rough sleeping or someone bedding down for the night would not constitute anti-social behaviour but if for example they were drug dealing or undertaking noise violations then action would be taken against them.
- Camden had a strong voice at the London level and worked closely with other boroughs, particularly on shared issues like rough sleeping, where there were similarities with central London boroughs such as Westminster. The Council engaged directly with central government on specific matters and collaborated with London Councils to lobby on key issues, especially around temporary accommodation, which was of significant concern in central London.
- Camden not only highlighted challenges to the housing sector but also demonstrated effective responses—such as building and purchasing housing stock to use as temporary accommodation—showing how councils could take greater control and offering local housing solutions.
- Camden was investing in its own temporary accommodation (TA) stock—such as building more hostels—and exploring models like Housing First, rather than directing funds to provide providers. Camden's strength in lobbying and public engagement lay not only in highlighting systemic challenges but also in showcasing practical, alternative solutions.
- Camden benefited from strong networks and partnerships, including with national organisations that ran commissioned services like hostels. These partners, such as Crisis, helped amplify Camden's voice on homelessness. Camden also worked closely with local providers—like Women at the Well and New Horizons—who delivered targeted support to specific communities.

By platforming these organisations, Camden demonstrated its innovative approaches and strengthened its influence in the sector.

- Camden had strong relationships with key third sector providers such as St Mungo's and the Single Homeless Project. Last year, the Council led a major initiative involving 12 local authorities to lobby the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on service charges. The aim was to allow payments to go directly to providers—where residents consented—rather than to individuals, helping to ensure the financial viability of supported housing. This was a clear example of Camden's proactive approach to tackling barriers to expanding supported housing. Additionally, Camden was part of the North London Partnership, working collaboratively with four other boroughs. This working together has led to the development a temporary accommodation (TA) dashboard to improve transparency and co-ordination across the region. This joint approach was especially important for addressing cross-border issues like rough sleeping and enabled more effective, strategic responses to be provided.
- A future report to the scrutiny would provide further information on the outcomes of the recommendations arising from the Homelessness Scrutiny Panel.
- It was recognised that the current service offer did not always meet the needs that needed to be provided, so there was an expectation that the hours worked would in future be more flexible. Also 8 new staff had been appointed who would now be able to help take the service offer forward.
- The Personal Passport was a really good way for people to be able to be much more empowered so they did not have to retell their story to every professional they saw, which could be very wearing or triggering for them. The Personal Passport approach was now being looked at as a model to help develop the referral form that was used for the whole pathway service.
- During the Everyone In initiative, a wide range of professionals—including those from housing, health, social care, and the voluntary sector—worked together to support people experiencing homelessness. Building on that, Camden created the Homelessness System Transformation Programme, which continued to influence the strategy today. Many of the collaborative ways of working from that time have remained, which was seen as a positive legacy.
- Leaders from mental health, adult social care, and substance misuse services now met regularly to discuss homelessness—something that didn't happen in the past. This joined-up approach was shaping how Camden plans future services, including the new contract for rough sleeping support. The Council expected future providers to be flexible and responsive to the needs of people sleeping rough, including when and how services were delivered.
- Camden was also responding to national guidance from central government, which was moving away from relying heavily on verification processes (like StreetLink) before offering support. The aim was to make services more accessible and responsive.
- Boroughs and central government had recognised that the process of verifying whether someone was sleeping rough often acted as a barrier to

providing help. Instead of focusing on proving someone was homeless, they found that offering support straight away led to better outcomes. Camden planned for its new service to move away from requiring contact with StreetLink or waiting for someone to be seen. The aim was to take a more flexible approach, offering support based on individual needs.

- Members should let officers know of community groups and voluntary sector groups that they felt should be approached.

ACTION BY: Members of the scrutiny committee

- It was expected that different teams would be based together in the hub. Training and meetings alone weren't enough—what was really needed was a fully integrated service, and that was what was planned to be delivered.
- It was expected that the new provider would offer women-only times and dedicated women-only spaces in the hub. This was intended to help engage women more effectively, especially in situations where they might not feel safe—such as when a perpetrator was nearby. Different ways to better support and reach women in need were going to be explored.
- Although it was difficult to prevent drugs from being brought into hostels without extreme measures e.g. strip searches—which it was felt would not help—the service would instead focus on education, drug programmes, and regular checks to reduce the issue. Excluding people who were currently using substances from hostels would not be effective, as that would prevent many from leaving the streets. Instead, a harm reduction approach was taken, where staff would work with individuals and encourage engagement with support services. While the service was strict about drug dealing and criminal activity, it was recognised that there was the need for tolerance to help people begin recovery.
- A strategic review of the hostel system was being undertaken to explore whether separate spaces might be needed for different groups—such as those trying to stop using substances and for those not yet ready to engage with support. One of the biggest barriers was the fear or perception of violence, which would be addressed. Officers hoped to share the outcomes of the review with future hostel residents to reassure them and improve safety.
- There were some women's only spaces in the pathway, but these were spaces within hostels rather than hostels of their own. Officers were now looking at whether that was something the Council would want to consider offering in the future.
- Officers would explore whether there was a stigma around attending hostels due to a perceived or real fear of violence linked to drug related crimes, and this being a major barrier resulting in rough sleepers not engaging with the service.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing (SM)

- Officers would give consideration to how the under 35 cohort could be given greater support as part of this process.

ACTION BY: Director of Housing (SM)

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

10. DRAFT HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2025 - 30

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Member for Safer Communities

The meeting determined to discuss this item along with item 9.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

11. HOUSING INVESTMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

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

Sinéad Burke, Head of Property Asset Management, took the meeting through the report and she along with Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, gave the following key responses to questions:

- The meeting was advised that there were no high-risk fire safety actions outstanding, with slightly more than half being medium risk and the remainder low risk. Also, a new process was in place to obtain the information being sought as part of the internal stock conditions survey.
- The aim of the internal stock condition survey was to reach 100% completion. A surveying firm had been hired to help achieve this, and their contract was reviewed and extended based on the number of surveys completed. It was hoped they would continue with these extensions and stay on schedule. The work was due to be finished by autumn 2026, with just over a year remaining. It was unlikely the full 100% would be achieved, as some residents were expected to refuse access, and there were no legal rights to force entry. It was expected that over 90% of properties would be surveyed, which was considered acceptable. The information that had been obtained so far was showing fewer homes than expected were found to be non-decent. The surveys also revealed a lower number of serious hazards, based on health and safety ratings. From the first 20% of surveys, only 15 homes had top-level hazards, such as damp and mould, which was one of the more common issues. Compared to the 2023 Condition Survey, there were fewer cases of

damp and mould, due to the significant work carried out in late 2023 to tackle those problems.

- Since 2023, the Council had installed smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, and this issue was now appearing far less often in the surveys. Overall, the surveys were showing a clear reduction in serious hazards.
- A benefit of aiming for 100% coverage was that it helped build a clearer picture of the housing stock. This allowed patterns to emerge, such as certain blocks having more issues with damp and mould than others. Some trends were noticed—for example, homes next to stairwells often had more problems, even though they weren't on external walls. This was likely because stairwells were unheated and often overlooked. These kinds of patterns were hard to spot just from asset data, but the surveys helped reveal them.
- The GEM's contract was in its final months, and the process of tendering for a new contractor was already underway.
- The Council had made every effort to maximise the number of social homes as part of development schemes. However, due to funding constraints, some homes had to be sold privately or offered as affordable housing to make the financial plans viable. In the Housing Investment Strategy agreed in January, the Council highlighted the need to provide a wide range of housing options to meet the diverse needs of tenants and residents. This included having options for people on good incomes who still struggled to rent and didn't qualify for social housing. The aim was to respond to as much of the housing demand as possible while making the best use of available financial options.
- The Council was the lead borough in the London Consortium for Warmer Homes, and part of the work it was undertaking in this area had established a pilot which it was looking to roll out 3,000 homes in terms of solar panels and storage. The aim was to have a first tranche commissioned during this financial year.

The scrutiny committee welcomed the progress that had been made in the areas regarding meeting the Decent Homes Standard, reducing the outstanding fire risk actions, and the work surrounding internal stock conditions survey.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

12. 2024/25 TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES (TSMS)

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

Elly Shepherd, Head of Housing Policy, Performance and Assurance, took the meeting through the report and she along with Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, and Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, gave the following key responses to questions:

- A report would be going to the next meeting of the scrutiny committee outlining the way the Council had sought to address the issues that had been raised by the Housing Ombudsman. The Housing Ombudsman were now expected to close their involvement with the Council.
- The Council had hosted a London Wide Complaints Forum, that brought together a number of London boroughs to discuss complaints handling and best practice in this area. The Council had put in place a number of revisions to its housing complaints handling service which all should lead to improvements going forward.
- Council officers were working with and when appropriate learning from other boroughs in the way they were seeking to improve Repairs Services, along with taking forward the requirements arising from Awaab's Law.
- It was expected that the authority would be able to provide a better picture of the financial challenges going forward as a result of the regulatory requirements, along with existing capital and revenue limitations it would face as part of the Housing Revenue Budget setting report that would be presented to the scrutiny committee in December.
- The Council worked with an independent research company to carry out the sampling. They made sure the surveys were done face-to-face to keep things consistent and well-presented. The survey was just one way of measuring how things were going, monthly performance data, service records, and feedback from tenants through other channels, such as resident panels and forums all of helped to build a fuller picture of the situation.
- Officers would ensure that the report coming to the next meeting of the scrutiny committee regarding Housing Ombudsman action plan, would provide data on the satisfaction levels regarding whether all parts of a complaint had been dealt with and not just ensuring a response was provided.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management (SR)

- Officers were seeking to ensure that repairs were dealt with in a timely manner so that tenants and residents were satisfied in the service that was provided by the Council, and through that avoid costly disrepair claims, the money from which mainly ended up with legal firms.
- The Housing Investment Strategy would enable the Council to invest in its homes to reduce pressure on the repairs service, especially in relation to Damp and Mould and heating system improvements, which was a key part of the plan. Officers had worked hard to improve system processes—making it easier for residents to report repairs and for managers to track and manage them in real time, including monitoring whether appointments were kept. This was all part of the Housing Transformation programme. In terms of complaints, the Council had worked with an independent research company to review how complaints were being handled, as part of an ongoing action plan and further data regarding what was happening on the ground would be provided as part of the Housing Ombudsman report that was coming to the next meeting.

- Officers would provide information regarding the number of repairs being carried out by all parts of the Repairs Service, damp and mould caseloads trends, the impact that occupancy was having on this, how the Council was communicating to residents effectively, how they could be helped to recognise damp and mould, the types of damp and mould and its causes, how they were being advised to deal with it, and how these issues were being tackled (including the use of decants to help tenants when necessary to allow for work to be done to their homes). This information would form part of the report going to the next meeting on Repairs Service Performance and preparation for Awaab's Law. Officers noted that Councillor Apak offered to work with them on this issue.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management

The scrutiny committee welcomed the work that had been done in improving the TSM measures relating to ASB handling, having a safe home and being kept informed about things that matters to tenants and residents. The scrutiny committee though wanted to see how the Council was proposing to improve the Repairs Service performance and the link it had with complaints processing and service satisfaction and asked for a report addressing these issues to be submitted to the next meeting. This report was to benchmark Council performance, look at the factors which drove good performance, best practice and consider future reporting.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted and the approach outlined by the meeting identified above be agreed.

13. INSIGHT, LEARNING AND IMPACT REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Directors

Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing, and Gavin Haynes, Director of Property Management, took the meeting through the report and they gave the following key responses to questions:

- The rents team had been reorganised to work across five neighbourhoods, aligning with the neighbourhood model. Within one year, and with the help of new technology, rent arrears were reduced by nearly £2 million—an amount that had taken around ten years to build up. Although the reduction may not have seemed fast, it was a significant turnaround in a short time, and further reductions were expected if progress continued at the same pace.

- The number of rent officers had been increased to ease the workload on housing officers. A new housing support team was also introduced to handle calls and emails, allowing housing officers more time to carry out tenancy visits and spend time on estates supporting residents.
- An officer was in place to ensure the Council received the correct number of nominations as agreed in housing association contracts. There was also ongoing work to strengthen collaboration with housing associations, particularly around temporary accommodation. Discussions had already begun on how to improve this partnership and clarify the Council's expectations.
- Officers would consider the appropriate fire safety metric's that should be in this report in future to allow performance to be measured. Also, the information regarding out-of-hours noise complaints responded to and the overall number of empty properties let would be included in the next report.

ACTION BY: Director of Property Management

- All new and existing staff would be given appropriate training, which would ensure they understood the Council's expectation on being accessible and ensuring the correct balance was being chosen when seeking to take enforcement action.

The scrutiny committee welcomed the work that the Housing Transformation programme was having in changing the culture of housing services.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted

14. 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:

- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 – 2030 – Cabinet Report (December 25)
- Further information as identified regarding Damp and Mould as part of report on Damp and Mould and response to Awaab's Law (September)
- Repairs Performance Report (September)

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

15th September

Housing Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 15th July, 2025

- S49 Ombudsman report and action plan
- Update on Damp and Mould and response to Awaab's Law
- Right to Buy Sales, Tenancy Fraud and Leaseholder services
- Voids performance
- **Repairs Performance**
- Work Programme

11th November

- Housing & Repairs Transformation Programme (to include use of AI in Housing, update on policies e.g. Vulnerability, Domestic Abuse and Allocations)
- Housing Associations Annual Performance Report
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy update (to include homeless scrutiny panel recommendations)
- Work Programme

9th December

- Cabinet Member Better Homes Update
- HRA Budgeting Report
- Insight, Learning and Impact Report (Quarter 2 2025/26)
- Work Programme
- **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 – 2030 – Cabinet Report**

12th January 2026

- HRA Budget & Rent Review 25/26
- Update on Private Rental Sector service (to include borough-wide HMO licensing scheme and no-fault evictions)
- Anti-Social Behaviour and Community Safety
- Work Programme

24th February

- Cabinet Member Better Homes Annual Report
- Community Investment Programme Annual report
- Work Programme

Yet to be programmed

None Identified

RESOLVED –

THAT the report work programme be revised as outlined above.

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There were none.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm.

CHAIR

Contact Officer: Gianni Franchi

Telephone No: 020 7974 1914

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

MINUTES END