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THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **MONDAY, 23RD FEBRUARY, 2026** at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 2, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Awale Olad (Chair), Nina De Ayala Parker, Sharon Hardwick, Matthew Kirk, Izzy Lenga, Rishi Madlani and Liam Martin-Lane and Steve Adams (Substitute)

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Stephen Stark

ALSO PRESENT

Councillors Nasrine Djemai (Cabinet Member for New Homes and Community Investment) Adam Harrison (Cabinet Member for Planning and a Sustainable Camden).

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 Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence was received from Councillor Stephen Stark who was substituted by Councillor Steve Adams.

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

Councillor Sharon Hardwick declared for transparency in relation to item 8 on the agenda (Camden Libraries Strategy 2026- 2031) that she worked for the Chartered Institute of Library Professionals.

Councillor Nina de Ayala Parker declared for transparency in relation to item 9 on the agenda (Street Trading and Market Strategy) that she was a member of NW3 Community Land Trust).

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)

The Chair announced that the meeting was broadcast live by the Council to the Internet and could be viewed on the website for six months after the meeting. After that time, webcasts were archived and could be made available on DVD upon request. Those who were seated in the room or participated via Teams were deemed to have consented to their contributions being recorded and broadcast and to the use of those sound recordings and images for webcasting and/or training purposes.

4. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)

The Chair informed members that two deputations had been received and accepted, copies of the deputation statements were included in the supplementary agenda.

The first deputation was from David Kaner, on behalf of Covent Garden Community Association and Tenants and Residents Associations Camden Town and was in relation to Camden's consultation response to the Greater London Authority's (GLA) Draft London Strategic Licensing Policy.

The second was from Mick Farrant which related to the Library Strategy (item 8) and Queens Crescent Library and would be considered with that item.

Camden's consultation response to the GLA Draft London Strategic Licensing Policy

Consideration was given to the deputation statement referred to above.

The following response was given by the depute to members questions:

They had no problem with the agent of change principle, However it must be applied both ways. New licensees moving into residential areas should be responsible for reducing their impact.

Residents had objected to the removal of cumulative impact areas in Camden's own policy. He stated that Camden did not collect data on street noise, which was the main impact of licenced premises, adding that the Mayor's policy implied that noise complaints in designated night-time areas should be ignored. He acknowledged that later licences could work if specific conditions were applied.

Regarding the increase in licenced premises, the depute stated there had been a 46% increase in the last 10 years, explaining that while some pubs had converted their use, the total number of licences had remained the same.

He expressed concern that the Mayor's call-in power could undermine Camden's current policy, which allowed for negotiation and agreement on conditions.

Oliver Jones, Director of Recreation and Public Safety, made the following comments in response to the deputation and members' questions:

- The Council intended to respond to the GLA's consultation. The deadline for the Council's response was due in approximately five weeks.
- The Committee was informed that a public consultation would not be undertaken by the Council due to time constraints and to avoid any potential bias in engagement.
- The borough's resident groups could provide their own response to the GLA as it was a public consultation.
- Although the Council would not conduct a public consultation, the deputation provided a valuable public record of residents' concerns that would inform the Council's response.

A Committee Member asked if the Council's consultation response could include a reference to the "agent of change" principle, specifically its two-way application.

In response the Director of Recreation and Public Safety stated that they could not confirm or deny specific wording for the response at that time as the deadline to provide the response was in due in 5 weeks.

The Chair informed the depute that the Committee would scrutinise Camden's response to the GLA's draft policy.

The deputees were thanked for their contribution.

5. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT

There was none.

6. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 12th January 2026 be signed as an accurate record.

7. THAMES WATER UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report of Thames Water.

Officers from Thames Water in attendance to respond to members questions were Kevin Brown, (Head of Asset Planning for Water, responsible for focusing on investment in water production and network projects); Alex Nixon, (Head of Environmental Compliance responsible for leading teams to ensure compliance with environmental requirements and seeking opportunities for nature-based solutions and catchment partnerships) and James Abbott, (Local Engagement Manager responsible for liaising with local government and elected representatives during incidents and major investments).

Issues raised by Committee Members were:

- Flood events in Kentish Town, South Hampstead and Belsize Road.
- Whether Thames Water monitored its pipes well enough.
- Slow or poor-quality reinstatement of footways and roads after repairs.
- The use of Camden as storage space, long working periods without activity, and substandard reinstatement work.
- Difficulty reporting leaks and flooding.
- High numbers of customer complaints.
- Sewer capacity, climate change and blocked drains.
- Future investment and replacement of high-risk pipes.
- Concerns about past shareholder dividends.

Thames Water Officers provided the following responses to members questions:

- Regarding drainage and flood risk management, it was explained that while full climate change upgrades to sewers were not feasible, the focus was on ensuring existing systems operated at full capacity. This involved tackling blockages through public awareness campaigns, proactive cleaning, and the use of sewer depth monitors.
- On customer contact, it was stated that typical escalated complaints received a response within two weeks, although specific timelines for initial reporting

could not be provided. Response times for reported issues varied by severity, and Thames Water would provide Service Level Agreements (SLAs).

- With regards to concerns raised about the Kentish Town burst, involving a water main not previously on Thames Water's radar, and about the organisation's prioritisation of investment, Thames Water's "Resilient 7" plan for managing flood risk was outlined. This included working with high-risk communities, ensuring optimal drain operation, protecting at-risk properties, reducing rainwater ingress into sewers via Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), adopting catchment-based approaches, ensuring new developments contributed to flood risk reduction, and increasing sewer capacity.
- It was acknowledged that current flood modelling may under-represent flood risk, partly due to under-reporting by residents. Thames Water was trialling integrated sewer surface models and confirmed that permeable pavement remained beneficial for water management.
- The replacement of a 15-inch pipe on Belsize Road was forecast to commence this year, while a 42-inch pipe would continue to be monitored.
- Regarding road gullies, it was clarified that the borough was responsible for the grate, drop, and gully pit, while Thames Water managed the connecting pipe to the main sewer. Issues with temporary repairs and continuous rocking were noted.
- With regards to the high burst frequency of pipes despite significant mains replacement, this was attributed to changing weather patterns and ageing assets.
- It was stated that Thames Water had a substantial leakage budget, and overall leakage rates were decreasing, although recent severe weather events had increased leaks and bursts, leading to delays in reinstatement.
- While Thames Water reported a high pass rate for reinstatement inspections, it was clarified this was based on a sample. Photos presented showing poor reinstatement were suggested to be interim measures due to material sourcing delays, and Thames Water agreed to investigate each case.
- Regarding investment and ownership, Thames Water stated they had not paid external dividends to current shareholders for seven years and were in negotiations for recapitalisation, although members cited data suggesting recent dividend payments. Thames Water agreed to provide confirmed information on their definition of dividends.
- With regards to Thames Water's one-star environmental performance rating, it was acknowledged that the organisation experienced too many pollutions but argued that pollution measurement was inconsistent across companies, and new guidance aimed to improve consistency.
- It was also noted that Thames Water received the highest number of customer complaints, and a new aftercare team and communications team had been established to address this. Thames Water believed that the private ownership model could facilitate significant investment, with bill increases directed towards environmental performance and customer service.
- A new Water Ombudsman was expected under national reforms which was welcomed.

In response to Members request for updates on outstanding insurance claims, Thames Water officers advised that they would need to consult the loss adjusters for individual case updates.

Thames Water officers agreed to provide the Committee with:

- Updates on reinstatement work concerns.
- Provide clarification on dividend payments.
- Confirm timelines for infrastructure works.

ACTION BY: Thames Water Local Engagement Manager

Thames Water officers were thanked for attending the meeting and responding to questions.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

8. CAMDEN LIBRARIES STRATEGY 2026-2031

Consideration was given to the deputation from Mick Farrant referred to in item 4.

In response to members questions the depute provided the following information.

- With regards to whether any libraries were currently up for disposal, the depute stated he was not aware of any current plans but was concerned due to historical attempts to close the library and other local closures.
- Regarding the library's atmosphere since the removal of security guards, the depute stated that library staff should not have to deal with difficult individuals, such as those using drugs in the toilets.
- The depute reiterated his concern about the history of closures in Gospel Oak and sought assurance from the Committee that the library would not be closed, as it was the most important organisation in the area.

In response to the deputation and members questions the Head of Libraries provided the following information:

- There was no intention to close any libraries in Camden through this strategy. The strategy focused on residents, digital inclusion, and information signposting.
- The service aimed to build on partnerships and work more closely with residents, confirming that the idea of a "Friends of Queen's Crescent Library"

group aligned with the strategy's direction for each library to have its own local plan developed with community groups.

- Regarding security, it was explained that security guards had been temporarily added to four libraries post-COVID but were removed at the end of 2023 due to resourcing. Since then, a proactive approach to managing incidents had been implemented, involving reporting and working with partners such as Adult Social Care, police, and Youth Services.
- There had been no increase in incidents at Queen's Crescent library since the security guard's removal. Measures included panic buttons, CCTV upgrades for real-time monitoring, and working with local schools. It was noted that residents generally felt libraries were safe spaces.
- On the issue of toilets, it was confirmed that an application had been made to Arts Council England for funding to refurbish Queen's Crescent Library, which included plans to increase toilet provision. The Council was also looking to extend the community toilet scheme across the borough.

The Committee welcomed the deputation noting that officers would continue to work on local engagement, safety and a Friends-style group.

The depute was thanked for his deputation.

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Recreation and Public Safety.

A Committee Member praised Camden's library service as exemplar, highlighting its achievements, such as the Green Library Hub award, and the positive impact of reading for pleasure.

The Chair noted that no one in Camden was more than a 30-minute walk from a library, with most being within 15 minutes, and the furthest point being Belsize into Hampstead.

In response to Committee Members questions, the Head of Libraries provided the following information:

- With regards to mitigation plans if future funding became challenging, given the significant external investment already secured, it was confirmed that Kilburn Library would close in May for six months for a £1.8 million refurbishment, including bringing the lower ground floor into use as a skills and opportunities hub, with reopening planned for October/November.
- An application for Queen's Crescent Library was pending for Round 4 of the Libraries Improvement Fund, with Round 5 also anticipated. The service aimed to maximise capital funding opportunities and was preparing to apply

for Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status, which could provide substantial annual funding for cultural programming.

- With regards to concerns raised about the piano in Swiss Cottage Library, suggesting it was noisy for a space designed for quiet concentration, it was acknowledged that there were two sides to the issue. Noting that the piano had facilitated recitals and brought joy to many. It was explained that, similar to Holborn Library, specific times would be introduced at Swiss Cottage when the piano would be available for play and when it would be locked. Ear defenders were now available at all libraries, and sensory spaces were being incorporated into refurbishments.
- With regards to Camden Libraries' policy on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its impact. The Head of Libraries stated that as Chair of London Libraries, she had convened an AI group to explore its implications for the sector. Free training programmes on digital literacy and AI were being offered to staff. She noted that the profession was still exploring the fast-moving field, with input from the University of Sheffield and Arts Council England, and that the debate included whether AI was always the necessary solution.

A Committee Member emphasised the importance of physical books alongside AI developments.

The Head of Libraries was thanked for attending the meeting, responding to questions and wished good luck with implementing the strategy.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

9. STREET TRADING AND MARKET STRATEGY 2026-2031

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Member for Homes and Community Investment.

In attendance to respond to members questions were Councillor Nasrine Djemai (Cabinet Member for New Homes and Community Investment) and Richard Bradbury Director of Environment and Sustainability.

Members asked the following questions:

- How Camden could support markets it does not run or not directly under its control (e.g. Canopy Market in King's Cross).
- How to increase stall diversity beyond food.
- How to reduce waste and encourage sustainable packaging.

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- Whether investment at Queen's Crescent was good value suggesting it had not yet delivered an uplift and that the money could have better funded the overall strategy.
- Ideas for weather-proofing markets during rain.
- A Committee Member declared their membership of the NW3 Community Land Trust (CLT) and praised the report for highlighting community-led initiatives like the CLT.

The following information was provided in response:

- There was scope to explore collaboration with street stores not directly managed by the Council. The Council would review licences to diversify the market offer.
- Regarding waste, the strategy included monitoring waste volume and working directly with traders, as well as promoting sustainability through initiatives like moving from gas to electric cooking. It was also noted that the strategy aligned with the climate action plan, encouraging the use of reusable containers and integrating repair trades and stores into market environments, such as at Cheltenham Street and Queen's Crescent.
- It was likely too early to assess the impact of the introduction of tighter licence conditions on changes in market practise regarding waste which had occurred in the previous six to nine months. The strategy included an annual review.
- It was explained that Queen's Crescent had been impacted by COVID and a prior decline. They noted that the market had reopened in October/November with a well-attended Winter Festival, which the strategy aimed to build upon. It was noted that the strategy included annual reviews to assess the impact of such investments.
- Members were also informed that redevelopments in the area, bringing new homes and residents, should increase footfall in the long term, countering the idea of the area becoming a "ghost town."

The Chair highlighted that Leather Lane market suffered catastrophic trading losses during rain and suggested exploring weatherproofing or waterproofing solutions for markets to prevent lost trading days. The Cabinet Member agreed that this was an area to explore, looking at international examples to cater for the UK's rainy climate. The Director of Environment and Sustainability added that resilience to heat (shade) was also important, and the strategy allowed for discussions on market design, while also recognising the diverse nature of traders.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report and the Street Trading and Market Strategy be noted.

10. CABINET MEMBER FOR NEW HOMES AND COMMUNITY INVESTMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

Consideration was given to the report of the Cabinet Member for New Homes and Community Investment.

The Cabinet Member introduced the report, which was accompanied by a video summarising the Community Investment Programme's (CIP) achievements.

The video highlighted: four projects under construction delivering 332 new homes (72% affordable); the completion of Little Place redevelopment (over 100 homes, school expansion, affordable workspace); Agar Grove Estate redevelopment Phase 4 reaching its highest point (94 social homes); planning consent for West Kentish Town redevelopment (over 300 Council homes); the opening of Highgate Newtown Community Centre; and awards for Agar Grove and Maitland Park.

Committee members made the following comments:

A Committee Member raised concerns about the height of some new buildings, specifically EU Capital and Regis Road, citing views from Hampstead Heath and the Heath and Hampstead Society's concerns about the ruination of protected views. They questioned why such heights were acceptable in Kentish Town when a 24-metre limit was applied south of Euston Road. The Committee Member also expressed cynicism about Regis Road delivering 50% affordable housing and questioned the feasibility of the EU Capital film studios, suggesting it might be a way to gain planning consent for large volumes that would later be converted to different uses, as studios were typically built outside central London.

Another Committee Member seconded an amendment from a previous Council meeting regarding height and protected views, noting that schemes over 30 metres were referred to the GLA. They praised the approval of Camley Street in January, particularly the retention of affordable housing targets, and asked for confirmation that the affordable housing portion would be delivered first. The Committee Member thanked officers for their work on illegal street trading near King's Cross. They also supported the vacant spaces on estates programme and asked if non-Camden estates and Registered Providers (RPs) could be encouraged to emulate this good practise.

A Committee Member responded to previous points, noting that areas south of Euston Road had Georgian mansion blocks and restrictions, making high-rise development difficult. They also suggested that filming was changing, with CGI and green rooms reducing the need for traditional large sets, though acknowledged the risks in such opportunities. The Committee Member then asked how the Council could prepare for more favourable market conditions to accelerate housing delivery, given the resilience of CIP despite past challenges (Brexit, inflation, interest rates). They also asked how to maintain an effective strategy amidst constant changes. Finally, they asked for an honest evaluation of lessons learned from initial Passive

House experiments and whether new homes were truly net-zero and future-proof, or if they would require retrofitting later.

In attendance to respond to questions were Councillor Djemai, Daniel Pope (Interim Director of Economy, Regeneration and Investment) and Richard Bradbury (Director of Environment and Sustainability). They provided the following response to Committee members questions and comments:

- It was explained that protected views were governed by the London View Management Framework. Stating that while strong regard was given to these views and cumulative impacts during planning assessments, the harm had to be balanced against the benefits, particularly affordable housing. Officers noted that while some developers sought to reduce affordable housing (e.g., St George's to 50%, SEC to 20%), CIP schemes delivered significant proportions (e.g., Camden Street 50%, West Kentish Town 35%). They highlighted the Council's housing target (2,425 homes completed in 2024/25, still short despite density) and the award-winning design of new homes. The Cabinet Member added that due to limited land, building upwards was often necessary to meet housing needs.
- The Cabinet Member confirmed that commencement for Camley Street was prioritised, with demolition imminent, and offered to provide exact timescales.
- Regarding vacant spaces, the Cabinet Member stated there was room for collaboration, noting that Registered Providers were part of the Housing Delivery Task Force and were open to working with the Council.
- The Cabinet Member explained that the Housing Delivery Task Force (report going to Cabinet on Wednesday) was convened to address these issues holistically, looking at the next 15 years, delivery methods, tenures, and stock management (including downsizing/upsizing). They noted that industry feedback highlighted planning framework reforms and the gateway process as blockers, requiring lobbying of national government.
- Regarding retrofitting, the Cabinet Member stated that new homes were built to be fit for the future and not require subsequent retrofitting but offered to investigate specific concerns. The interim Director of Economy, Regeneration and Investment added that Camden Living, set up as a Registered Provider, aimed to deliver 500 homes, taking pressure off the Housing Revenue Account and filling gaps in Section 106 provision. The Cabinet Member offered to provide a briefing note on lessons learned from Passive House experiments.

ACTION BY Cabinet Member for New Homes and Community Investment

- A Committee Member asked for more details on the Housing Delivery Task Force, specifically why it was initiated. The Cabinet Member explained it was principle-based, driven by a desire to proactively find solutions to the housing crisis for future generations, building on CIP's resilience during turbulent

times. The task force brought together expertise from academics, industry, RPs, and residents to identify solutions rather than just discussing problems.

The Cabinet Member for New Homes and Community Investment and Officers were thanked for their work, time taken to attend the meeting and their responses.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

11. CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director Investment Place and Opportunity.

Members discussed the work programme noting that one meeting remained for the municipal year.

The upcoming meeting would include reports from the Cabinet Advisor for food waste recycling, a CCTV strategy, and a biodiversity update.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END

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