

CAMDEN LEASEHOLDERS' FORUM SURVEY 2020

Report February 2021



Camden Leaseholders Forum Survey 2020; why do it, lessons from doing it, what it showed and the lessons learnt.

Why do it

When the Forum was set up most Camden leaseholders were ex-tenants who had bought their home through the Right to Buy. New leaseholders were challenging how Camden was managing its housing in general, and specifically theirs. The number of new sales has fallen, and leaseholds have stabilised at about 9,760. 40% of leaseholders ask for their mail to go to an alternative address, in some cases outside the UK. 30% are known to be subletting. Leases may be held by more than one person, and some people (and organisations) own more than one lease. So, there are likely to be about 9,500 leaseholders, approaching half of whom do not live in their Camden property, and many were never Camden tenants. With the pandemic has come online meetings. In general, they seem to be attracting higher attendances than traditional town hall meetings. This could help a group concerned about issues in Camden but living elsewhere. It seemed timely to explore leaseholders' views whilst we all sort out how to live during the pandemic and in the new world once it formally ends.

Lessons from doing it

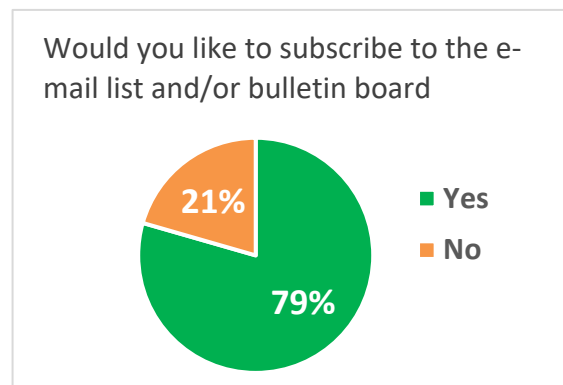
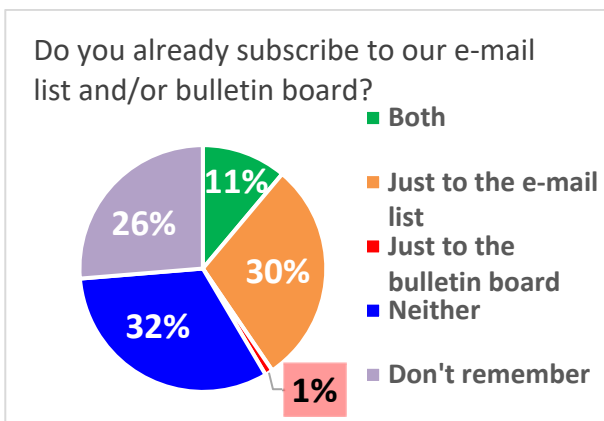
70% of leaseholders have joined the Camden Account to help manage their homes. That is 6,650 leaseholders with an email address known to Camden and so would be the group to survey (the Forum has no funds for a postal survey). We were told that we cannot have access to those addresses. However, Tenant Participation (TP) had obtained consent from 17,000 Council tenants and leaseholders to answer surveys, amongst which are 5,965 leaseholders, 90% of our target group. We obtained TP agreement to send out our survey and obtained consent from Camden's Information Governance team as well. It was therefore issued to 5,562 leaseholders then on the TP database. 99.1% of the messages were delivered, and 51% were opened. A follow-up email was issued later with further openings and responses. The Forum runs an email messaging service to leaseholders and a website bulletin board. After the survey was issued it became clear that some leaseholders known to the Forum had not received it - some having been sent to an out-of-date email address. We therefore circulated the survey to both the groups known to the Forum totalling 980 so the survey was in total sent to 6,542 email addresses (with an unknown number of duplicates). The main message to learn from this is that no email list is static; it needs to be refreshed regularly. This presumably applies to the survey list in general and not just to leaseholders. If it is to be used as an alternative method of surveying resident opinions the list must be updated and its state known for any particular consultation as set out here. Updating should be against the Camden Account and any other available contacts with people on the list. The data owner of the TP list should take appropriate action in line with data legislation.

SURVEY	Sent email	Responded	Response
Camden leaseholder database	5562	570	10%
Forum Mailing list & Bulletin board	980	192	20%
	6,542	762	11%

What it showed and lessons learnt

The overall response rate of 11% (762) was entirely what might be expected in a survey of this type, but less than we had hoped for. The response rate for those known to the Forum was 20%, and from the general list 10%. So, besides the Forum members, there was a group of about 1,000 leaseholders in more regular contact with the Forum and more positive about working with it.

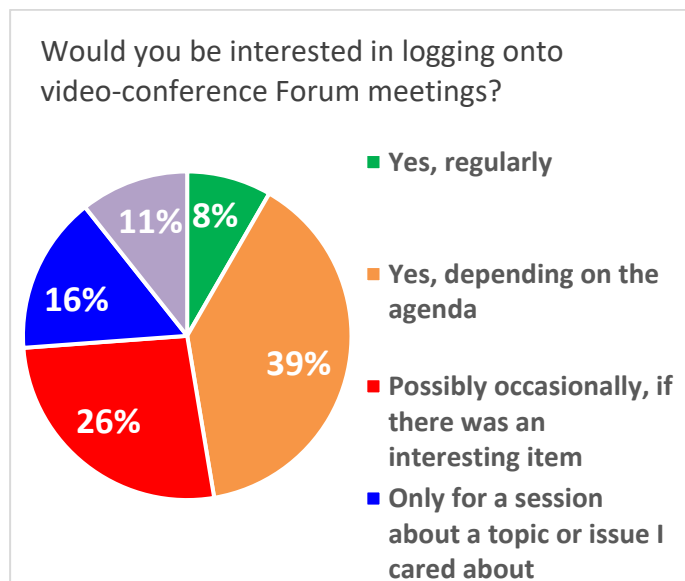
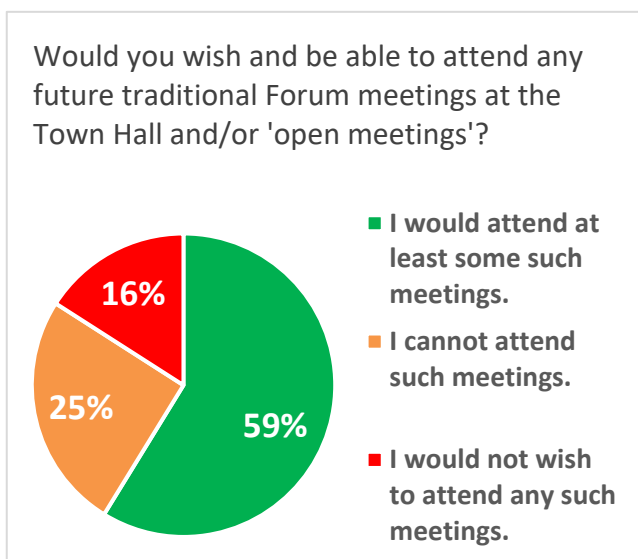
63% of respondents knew of the Forum before the survey, but less than half had already signed up to its communications channels, predominantly for e-mails and only 1% to the bulletin board alone.



We asked the half who had not signed up if they wished to do so; 330 opted in so our contact list increased from 980 to 1,310.

We have not yet reached all leaseholders who might wish to be in contact. We need to think how we might increase our reach and relevance still further using the evidence from the survey to define an updated service and justify further efforts to tell leaseholders about the Forum and widen their participation. Emailing about the bulletin board topics could be helpful.

We asked respondents about attending online meetings and more traditional sessions at the Town Hall. 76 (10%) said they would never attend a meeting at all. 25% said they would be unable to attend sessions at the Town Hall and 16% said they would not wish to - suggesting that 41% would not attend a traditional meeting.



Conversely, 11% said they would not attend any online sessions and 73% said they would attend with some regularity. A rough weighted analysis suggests that moving to online meetings might increase attendance from 30% to 50% of the respondents. Overall, the results suggest that we could reach more leaseholders by mixing online and face-to-face meetings.

We kept the survey short, but gave space for comments asking 'Have you any comments on the service you get from Camden's Leaseholder Services, Housing Management or the Repairs and Capital Programme and how they might improve?' 438 respondents commented (58%). Comments were made about Leaseholder Services with some compliments. There were comments about major works and repairs, and a thread of wanting better induction for new leaseholders particularly on how to deal with the council bureaucracy. We also asked for any other ideas on how the Forum might help respondents, to which there were 245 responses - many with ideas about improving services from the Council. The responses were deliberately anonymised, and we should be grateful for them as a high proportion showed considerable insight and were carefully crafted. We should respect the effort involved in submitting them by analysing them, making any necessary changes and patterning Forum work around them.

We have analysed the comments and distilled a number of suggestions which are annexed below. A full list of all survey comments may be found on the Forum website (www.leaseholdersforum.org.uk/).

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ANNEX A

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING CAMDEN SERVICES TO LEASEHOLDERS
distilled from comments on the services provided by Camden and how they might improve

LEASEHOLDER SERVICES	
1	SUGGESTED COMMON ISSUES: Management to ensure teams/departments communicate with each other; retrain staff to communicate courteously with leaseholders as clients; employ sufficient staff to deliver appropriate service level standards across the departments; update the leaseholder database
2	Respond promptly and listen sympathetically to leaseholder calls and emails; respond to the enquiry or indicate when a full response will be provided; chase-up internally as necessary and report back to leaseholder (117)
3	Maintain a list of Council contacts/roles with email addresses and publish online - to assist leaseholders to contact the right person (32)
4	Provide a Guide for new (and all) leaseholders on Council & Leaseholder responsibilities, including introduction to the Forum (21)
5	Be available to meet with leaseholders to listen and help with concerns; have drop-in sessions at times convenient to those who work (20)
6	Provide more help to leaseholders so that they feel supported; identify and explain lease obligations; perhaps have a monitored online HELP service (10)
7	Have a single named manager for each estate to enable a coherent joined-up approach and knowledge source for residents (4)
8	Communicate better with TRAs; have twice-yearly meetings with Chairs and Secretaries of Resident Associations (3)
9	Communicate by email whenever possible and only on matters relevant to the recipient (4)
10	Help leaseholders by providing a layman's summary 'explainer' to accompany service charge demands and contract consultation packs (11)
11	Promote better understanding and neighbourly relationships between tenants and leaseholders, through meetings and better communication (17)
12	Listen to residents' suggestions to improve the caretaking service and action where feasible; inform residents of caretaker duties to manage expectations (22)

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LEASEHOLDER SERVICES (Continued)	
13	Provide promptly a detailed itemised breakdown and supporting invoices for actual costs in works charges demands (23)
14	Provide promptly a detailed breakdown of overheads and management costs in service charge demands (17)
15	Don't bully and don't be so quick to take leaseholders to court (11)
16	Publish clear guidance on the options for paying charges by instalments; provide a direct debit payment option (12)
17	Build a sinking fund for planned future major works (4)
18	Maintain a log of reported IT problems with Council online services, record how and when an item is closed and inform person who raised the item (6)
19	Engage with and support leaseholders who are seeking the provision of additional facilities, such as on-site bicycle parking, smart meters, fire doors (5)
20	Make it easier for a leaseholder to get information about the cost of extending a lease (5)
21	Provide support and regular updates to affected leaseholders about the impact of HS2 and Crossrail 2 (2)
22	Where external cladding is a concern, engage with leaseholders and provide regular updates on funding, timescales and progress (2)
23	Engage with and support leaseholders who have concerns about EPC ratings and develop appropriate proposals to improve (1)
24	Improve the process for approval for alterations (1)
25	Housing - Respond promptly to leaseholder telephone calls and emails; improve Handyman response time and service quality (8)
REPAIRS	
26	Repairs - Engage with leaseholders to understand their repairs & planned maintenance priorities and develop a programme for the works (93)
27	Repairs - Listen sympathetically and provide a prompt professional response to leaseholders' grievances with regard to work done or work needed (88)

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REPAIRS (Continued)	
28	Repairs - Insist on 'right first time' quality of work and identify accountability; require all work to be inspected and signed-off by Council Supervisor (77)
29	Repairs - Keep affected leaseholders regularly informed of progress and completion and any changes to timescales and costs (76)
30	Repairs - When a leaseholder has reported a repair inform them when the repair is completed (11)
31	Repairs - Enable access to online repair logging for all leaseholders; permit a description of the repair where tick-box items are not relevant (7)
32	Repairs - Need to think differently (to blocks of flats) about repairs programmes for street properties (2)
MAJOR WORKS	
33	Major works - Keep affected leaseholders regularly informed of progress and provide a detailed explanation of any changes to timescales and costs (69)
34	Major Works - Enable greater leaseholder opportunity for involvement in planning of major works and control of their delivery (54)
35	Major Works - Insist on 'right first time' quality of work and identify accountability; require all work to be inspected and signed-off by Council Supervisor (52)
36	Major Works - Listen sympathetically and provide a prompt professional response to leaseholders' grievances with regard to the works (59)
37	Major Works - When requested, provide leaseholders with an explanation of how 'value for money' is evidenced (48)
38	Major Works - Complete the contract financial account and issue the final payment demand very soon after works finish (25)

(in brackets the number of associated responses)

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ANNEX B

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING FORUM SUPPORT TO LEASEHOLDERS
distilled from responses to “any other ideas on how the Forum might help you?”

1	The Forum must hold the Council to account / must overcome an identity problem / must answer email (40)
2	Improve effectiveness of Forum meetings and the website; hold physical meetings which are also made available to anyone who wants to join online (17)
3	Have 'focus groups' meeting on particular issues affecting leaseholders (15)
4	Help leaseholders identify others with similar issues to share ideas; promote the online bulletin board (21)
5	Expand online frequently asked questions (FAQs) and Leaseholder Guides (24)
6	Have the Council inform new leaseholders of the Forum; have pre-planned periodic induction for new leaseholders (8)
7	Keep leaseholders informed with what's going on in Camden; invite leaseholders to send in newsworthy items (14)
8	Have the Council publish information about works that are in the pipeline and report progress on works being carried out (9)
9	Provide details of leaseholder associations on estates (and help with forming); identify neighbouring leasehold properties (24)
10	Promote community engagement; have an estate comment box for residents to express their views; conduct estate resident surveys (16)
11	Ensure good standards are maintained for safety, minor repairs, regular maintenance and cleaning/ building appearance (16)
12	Engage with the Council to ensure 'right first time' is achieved on works projects; ensure specialist tradesmen are used for street properties where appropriate (12)
13	Engage with the Council on behalf of leaseholders to monitor cost and programme efficiency on works projects (22)
14	Publish a history of issues the Forum has raised with the Council, and their outcomes (2)

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15	Help leaseholders to understand and, if necessary, to challenge Major Works bills (7)
16	Provide guidance on lease extensions (6)
17	Help leaseholders to understand the terms of their lease (1)
18	Provide one-to-one advice for leaseholders; explain service charges; support in challenging the Council (17)
19	Have a 'knowledge bank' of contacts who can provide guidance on particular issues (3)
20	Facilitate meetings between leaseholder and Council and attend as an independent arbitrator (1)
21	Establish legal guidance support for leaseholders (5)
22	Carry out a forensic audit on behalf of leaseholders where charged costs appear to be unreasonable (14)
23	Support leaseholders in conversation with Council about problems with tenant neighbour properties, such as leaks and anti-social behaviour (5)
24	Attend works project consultation meetings as an advocate for leaseholders (8)
25	Lobby the Council for a payment option to attach capital works costs to leases and wills (1)
26	Recommend handyman services for leaseholders' use (2)

(in brackets the number of associated responses)