

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **LEASEHOLDERS' FORUM** held on **TUESDAY, 20TH SEPTEMBER, 2022** at 7.00 pm in Committee Room 1, Crowndale Centre, 218 Eversholt Street, London, NW1 1BD

MEMBERS OF THE FORUM PRESENT

Carolyn Morgan (Chair)
Peter Wright (Vice- chair)
Aldires Bugia
Philip Dunne (joined remotely)
Patrick Hagopian (joined remotely)
David Hart (joined remotely)
Rosalie Miles
Joy Palmer
Andrew Purves
Clive Sneddon (joined remotely)
Martyn Swain
Karl Vaughan
Richard Walker
Thomas Watkins
Wolfram Westendorf (joined remotely)

OTHER LEASEHOLDERS PRESENT

Ann Sadler-Forster
Bharti Vaja
Bill Miller
Caroline Mawer
Eileen Willmott
Iain Mcsween
Isabella Luger
Jayanthi Lewis
Jennifer Fauquet
Jonathan Evans
Julia Oertli
Krupa Thakrar
Lesley Mortell
Mandy Stoker
Melissa Marsh
Monica Threlfall
Nasima Khanom
Nick Grande
Olivia Allen
Ricci De Freitas
Sarah Jensen

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Meric Apak, Cabinet Member for Better Homes
Susanne Afra, Head of Planned Capital Works (joined remotely)
Thomas Broad, Consultation Manager Property Management (joined remotely)
Louise Coster, Senior Energy Management Officer (joined remotely)
Ododo Dafe, Head of Housing Transformation
Julie Granger Senior Energy Management Officer (joined remotely)
Sola Odusina, Principal Committee Officer
Glendine Shepherd, Director of Housing

These minutes are in draft form only and therefore not approved or amended until the next meeting of the Leaseholders' Forum. Please note that these minutes include opinions expressed by the attendees at the meeting and should not be regarded as giving advice.

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND INTRODUCTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Laureline Champion.

Other Forum members not present included, George Ambrose, Dane Cummings and Sumsum Naher.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

There were none.

3. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of 31st May 2022 and the actions arising from those minutes.

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 31st May 2022 be approved as an accurate record subject to amending the attendance of Karl Vaughan at that meeting from remote attendance to in-person attendance.

With regards to the action points arising from those minutes:

- The Leaseholders' Forum Communications Member was asked to collate information on the location and property type of current LHF members and where gaps were identified to invite suitable applicants to apply.
- The Communications Officer reported that 5 of the 19 Forum Representatives were leaseholders of a street property, which meant that 25% of the membership represented street properties. He also informed the Forum that there were no street property members living in Camden Town or Holborn, and if required a geographical analysis of the membership could be shared with Leaseholders.
- It was requested that Timothy Draper (elected at the last LHF election) be taken off the LHF membership list as he had never attended any Forum meeting or responded to any correspondence.
- The Finance and Income Manager who was covering the work of the Head of Leaseholder Services could not attend today's meeting, the outstanding actions attributed to her were being followed up with the Director of Housing.
- The information on how to access Camden's Complaints Process had been circulated via the Leaseholders mailing list.

4. CONSTITUTION AND CODE OF CONDUCT

Consideration was given to the LHF Constitution and Code of Conduct.

The Chair informed the Forum that a Working Group had been pulled together to look at the LHF Constitution and Code of Conduct in more detail. She commented that it had been an exhaustive and thorough process including discussions at meetings of the working group on zoom.

The amended Constitution and Code of Conduct had been circulated with the agenda and Leaseholders were asked if they had any further comments on the document.

The Chair informed the Forum that there was a process for co-opting additional members, advising that the forum could have 21 members. The Forum currently consisted of 19 members. There was a co-option process taking place at the moment to get the membership up to 21. There was 1 vacancy each in the Kentish Town and Gospel Oak districts. Expressions of interest had been invited for the vacancies with a submission deadline of 23rd September 2022.

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A Panel consisting of the Chair, Vice Chair and Forum Communications Member would go through the assessments of preferential status – with a higher priority given to a candidate residing in a street property. If there was no expression of interest from a street property candidate the next preference would be a TRA resident representative. The TRA representative would be requested to get a recommendation from the Chair of the TRA. The ballot paper for the election would be sent out to the 1300 leaseholders on the mailing list.

The Communications Member advised that if the votes for the 2 Co-opted members needed to go to ballot, this would take place by the middle of October and the Forum should know the results of the election by November 2022.

In the absence of any comments from Leaseholders on the Constitution and Code of Conduct, the Forum was asked to formally adopt the document.

On being put to the vote amongst the LHF membership, with 13 in favour, 0 against and 1 abstention, it was

RESOLVED -

That the Constitution and Code of Conduct be adopted by the Forum.

5. REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

Consideration was given to the updates from the Working Groups.

The Chair informed Leaseholders that a number of Working Groups had been set up at the last LHF meeting in May 2022, they had been tasked with working with officers to address issues arising from the Leaseholder Survey carried out in 2020

Leaseholder Services

The recently appointed Director of Housing addressed the Forum thanking the Chair of the Forum and the Council's Finance Income Manager for their work and stepping in to cover the work of the Head of Leaseholder Services.

She commented that her service was taking forward a lot of the suggestions that came out of the survey, noting that a lot of work had gone on and she fully supported the work of the working group. She was happy to unblock any blockages in the system. It was noted that although the survey had been carried out 2 years ago there was still the issue of Leaseholders not knowing which Camden officer to contact to address any issues of concern.

The Director of Housing informed Leaseholders that a small but useful action the service was implementing was to put a lot more information on the Leaseholder Service section of the Camden website including which team to contact for various issues. The Finance Income Manager had produced a first draft, there had been a

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request that the links on the website should be made easier to understand to help leaseholders know which team to contact.

Leaseholders were informed that the department was looking into acquiring a correspondence management system which would allow the management team to monitor and track enquiries, as currently enquiries were allocated to staff by manually updating spreadsheets. There were a number of options being considered including the recruitment of an officer that would assist in unblocking some of the issues. It was noted that this would be a win-win situation for Leaseholders and the Council as it would allow for a smoother process and speedier response to enquiries.

Responding to a members note of caution about IT system working in one service area but not across the Council as a whole, the Director of Housing commented that the officer tasked with the project was looking at systems that worked corporately and not just one service area. The Forum was to be updated on the project to set up a correspondence management system.

Action By: Director of Housing

Major Works Working Group

The Chair commented that a main issue of concern in this area related to Leaseholders having sufficient advance notice and information regarding works being planned on their property. She informed Leaseholders that after having discussions with officers it was pointed out that this facility was already available on the Camden Account system and what would be helpful, was for leaseholders to try out the facility and provide feedback.

Action By: Leaseholders

Susanna Afra Head of Planned Capital Works updated the Forum on the work of the Assets Strategy Team and the Stock Condition Survey process.

Leaseholders were informed that the process involved recommendations around which assets needed replacing and a forward programme of planned major works was available on the Camden account. There was also information on fire safety works which was updated regularly and also indicated what actions were required, this was shared with the Council's Fire Safety and Advisory Panel. Some thought was being put into how this information could be shared with Leaseholders. Other programmes of work included the retrofit programme which would address the carbon agenda.

Responding to questions about how residents would know of any planned upcoming works, the Head of Planned Capital Works commented that when any project was allocated, a discussion would be had at an early stage with residents, this would involve a lot of door knocking. However, the project management team could do with additional support around communication and engagement as the Council did not have email addresses of residents. The Leaseholders Services team also worked

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with residents and TRAs providing information on other programmes of work such as Better Homes and whether other programmes of work were to be added.

The Consultation Manager Property Management provided the Forum with an overview of the engagement process with residents for Capital Works projects as presented on pages 35 and 36 of the agenda, He highlighted that there was no 'one size fits all' approach to engaging with residents, noting that capital works projects varied significantly in their scope and the Council's approach was always tailored depending on the project and community affected.

Responding to Leaseholders questions he made the following comments

- The Council had the correspondence address of leaseholders that did not reside in the property, who were written to about prospective upcoming work.
- The Council also conducted on-line meetings with an explanation of the works needed and what the project entailed.
- Useful feedback was often received from residents.
- The Project Manager's contact details were made available to everybody affected by the planned works.
- With regards to the tendering process for works, there was a statutory consultation process involved.
- Upon the appointment of a contractor, everyone was invited to a public meeting where the opportunity was taken to introduce the contractor to residents.
- Residents first point of contact was the contractor on site.

The Chair informed Leaseholders that the Working Group had provided feedback to the Consultation Manager Property Management on the engagement process, noting that the process he described had not always taken place up till now and going forward this was the level of service leaseholders should expect. Leaseholders commented that a lot of issues had arisen because people had felt that they had not been consulted and early engagement had not taken place.

The Chair suggested that a Working Group should be formed consisting of Forum members and Leaseholders (with a desire to be involved), to iron out the issues of what to expect and provide a shared document agreeing to how people would be engaged/consulted on upcoming planned major works.

Forum members and Leaseholders if interested in becoming members of the Working Group to work with the Consultation Manager Property Management were asked to email camden@leaseholdersforum.org.uk indicating their interest.

Action By: Leaseholders/Forum members

Answering further questions, the Consultation Manager Property Management and Head of Capital Planned Works commented that:

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- he was happy to listen to any suggestions, working with the Working Group, making sure information was available and how residents could access it.

Action By: Consultation Manager Property Management

- Engagement involved anybody affected by the planned work including leaseholders, tenants and residents.
- In relation to the stock condition survey and the scope of projects, there was normally a discussion with representative groups where additional work could be added/amended with the agreement of stakeholders.
- In some instances, the work would need to be carried out immediately where for instance there was a leaking roof.
- The Council was trying to do more work on engagement and resident make up in relation to the different languages spoken within the community and a whole range of other steps to improve engagement.
- There were some occasions where meetings had been arranged locally and there had been very low turn-out with very few residents turning up for arranged meetings.
- The majority of contractors chosen to carry out the work used Camden's Work Framework, the Capital Works team worked with Camden's Procurement team who vetted everything being done.
- The tender was carried out through the procurement team, the contractors on the Camden Framework had been through a lengthy vetting process.
- Contracts were awarded based on price, which was usually the cheapest firm that won the tender.
- The Clerk of works who was an independent consultant checked the quality of works.
- The key contact was the Project Manager who would introduce themselves at an early stage in the process.

A Forum member commented that there were serious deficiencies the Stock Condition Survey as the dates between surveys were too long. Another Forum member was of the view that there was a gap between the earnest ideas put forward by officers and the reality on the ground and would be providing individual feedback to the Head of Planned Capital Works,

Leaseholders queried Florries Law and the circumstances in which it was likely to be applied. The Chair suggested that this issue should be raised with the Director of Housing for her to clarify.

Action By: Director of Housing

Communications Working Group

Leaseholders were reminded that the Forum website Discussion Board had an option for users to receive a digest of posts (whether daily, weekly or monthly) with or instead of instant email notifications. These options could be set in a user's

preferences - or users could email camden@leaseholdersforum.org.uk and their preferences would be changed.

RESOLVED –

THAT the update report be noted.

6. ENERGY PROCUREMENT

Consideration was given to the Council's Energy Procurement Strategy and Dispensation for Camden's Energy Contracts.

The Senior Energy Management Officers informed Leaseholders of the Council's upcoming energy procurement strategy, and the need to seek dispensation exempting the Council from the statutory consultation procedures (as defined under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985), and to consider any comments the Forum might have.

They highlighted that:

- in 2019 Camden was awarded a dispensation exempting the Council from the statutory consultation procedures (as defined under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985), for a period of four and a half years, in relation to the purchase of gas and electricity for its housing sites.
- Explaining that without a dispensation in place, legislation required Camden to give written notice to leaseholders for any prices received and wait for a response. The current dispensation expired in April 2025 and covered the existing contract arrangements for Oct 2020 – Sep 2024.
- Camden currently procured energy through a public sector buying organisation (BO) and it intended to go to the Council's Cabinet in November 2022 to renew the procurement strategy.

Leaseholders were informed that:

- Camden's current BO was LASER, who purchased energy for 235 public sector customers, with a combined energy spend of over £800 million. Using a BO allowed Camden to aggregate the Council's required gas and electricity volume with LASER's other customers, to buy energy from the wholesale markets in an effective and risk managed way. Camden does not use sufficient volumes of energy to go direct to the wholesale market and receive a competitive price.

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- Camden's procurement strategy limited its exposure to energy market volatility by allowing the organisation to purchase energy over a period in advance of the supply date. This strategy allowed Camden to hedge against the current inflationary pressures by purchasing all gas for the current supply period (Oct 21-Sep 22) over the course of 2020 and 2021 when prices were relatively low, meaning that gas and electricity prices were fixed until September 2022.
- Camden had also forward purchased significant energy volumes for the next Oct 22 - Sep 23 supply period over 2020/21, however, energy prices are still expected to be higher for this period, given the extreme volatility of the wholesale energy markets and with remaining volumes to buy.
- It was highlighted that gas prices secured for Camden residents were typically around half the cost of retail gas prices. LASER's buying strategy had consistently performed much better than the domestic market.

Leaseholders were informed that once the Council's Cabinet had approved the procurement strategy, a dispensation for a further 4 years would be sought to cover the next energy contract period of Oct 2024 – Sep 2028. This was to secure best prices and to help manage the continuing volatility across the wholesale energy markets, the dispensation was necessary because there was no practical way of consulting with leaseholders in advance, in a timely manner, during the energy buying process, as gas and electricity was bought in advance of the supply period. Camden needed the new dispensation preferably in place before February 2023, so the appointed BO could start buying energy ahead of the supply period.

Responding to Leaseholders questions the Senior Energy Management Officers gave the following comments:

- Camden was not a domestic customer, it was seen as a commercial customer.
- The Council was going early to secure better prices, there was no practical way of consulting in advance, dispensation needed to be in place by February 2023.
- It did not apply to energy used in Leaseholders flats, it related to heating and energy supplies used in communal areas and district heating systems.
- Prices were expected to be below the future energy cap.
- At the moment there was no knowledge of what the future price cap would be. The Council was still waiting for government guidelines.
- Leaseholder Services would lead on this when the information regarding price caps was made available.
- With regards to the Bharti District Heating System energy prices would be paid through leaseholder charges, leaseholders would have to wait until those prices came through.

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- The Senior Energy Management Officers were asked to speak to Leaseholder Service colleagues to provide information to Leaseholders on what charges they would be paying for the District Heating System.

Action by: Senior Energy Management Officers/Director of Housing

Resolved

To note the report.

7. RESIDENT SURVEY

Consideration was given to a verbal update on the Resident Survey by the Head of Housing Transformation.

Leaseholders were informed that the last Resident Survey occurred in 2019, the Council was committed to carry out the survey every 3 years. However, it was not the right time to conduct the survey at the moment as the Council was waiting for Central Government to issue guidelines for the survey. It was likely to occur in early 2023 or spring before the summer.

Responding to Leaseholders questions, the Head of Housing Transformation commented that:

- The Department for Levelling Up would have a particular view on how the Survey was to be conducted. At the moment officers could not confirm whether the survey would be conducted on-line.
- Central Government was very interested in residents' satisfaction, particularly, taking on board lessons from the Grenfell tragedy. The bill and guidelines from government had not yet come out.
- Different methodologies in conducting the survey would produce different results.
- It was possible for residents/leaseholders to suggest questions to add to the survey, however the longer the survey the less likely it would be completed at the scheduled time.

The Forum asked that it be kept informed about when the Survey would commence and whether there were opportunities to add questions to the survey.

Action by: Head of Housing Transformation

A member commented that it would be useful when the survey results came out that it was benchmarked with other boroughs. A member also asked if the results of the 2019 resident survey could be circulated. It was noted that the last STAR survey was in 2 parts, with one being for Leaseholders and the other for tenants.

The Head of Housing Transformation was thanked for the update.

Resolved:

That the verbal update be noted.

8. STREET PROPERTY UPDATE

Consideration was given to the verbal Street Property update by Joy Palmer.

Joy Palmer reported that she had attended the Street Property Committee meeting, there was an item of discussion on the meeting agenda relating to Leaseholders and Tenants and inspection of properties to ensure compliance with fire regulations. Camden was undertaking a pilot testing of street properties and there were issues with gaining access to communal areas of these properties. There had been a 30% failure rate.

Leaseholders were informed that consideration was being given to using a universal key to gain access to communal areas to check smoke alarms. Ms Palmer also reported that due to the number of burglaries in Harrington Square, bars had been placed across doors and windows, fire inspectors had asked that these bars be removed.

There followed a general discussion amongst leaseholders of which concerns were raised about security issues with providing a universal key to access properties, providing notification in advance to residents of intended visits, the cost of the inspections and smoke alarms to leaseholders, how this would affect residents' insurance premiums and the lack of proper consultation. There was a suggestion that the pilot should be halted until proper consultation had been carried out with residents.

The Chair asked that anybody with any further comments or that had been through the pilot to pass on the information to the Repairs Working Group.

Action by: Leaseholders

The Forum was advised that this issue fell within the remit of the Head of Housing Repairs. The Repairs Working Group was asked to have a follow up meeting with the Head of Housing Repairs to discuss these issues and request a response.

Action by: Repairs Working Group / Head of Housing Repairs

A Forum member commented on the Caretaking Service, remarking that there was no proper coordination between the Caretaking Section and the rest of the Council

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and should be looked into. The Chair commented that a generic issue with regards to caretaking should be taken up with the Finance Income Manager.

Resolved:

That the verbal update be noted.

9. FUTURE MEETING DATES

Forthcoming meetings

The meetings would be hybrid, in a Committee Room at Crowndale as follows:

Tuesday 22 November at 7pm

Tuesday 14 March 2023 at 7pm

Tuesday 30 May 2023 at 7pm

The Chair thanked all officers for their attendance at the meeting.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END