


LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARD(S): ALL
REPORT TITLE: Annual Report of the Cabinet Member for Better Homes: February 2024	
REPORT OF: Cabinet Member for Better Homes	
FOR SUBMISSION TO: Housing Scrutiny Committee	DATE: 22 February 2024
SUMMARY OF REPORT: <p>The Cabinet Member for Better Homes here provides the Committee with their annual report for discussion. This year's report includes key timely updates from relevant teams in the portfolio who serve our residents and Camden communities, along with other information relevant to the Committee for the portfolio area.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to information:</p> <p>No documents that are required to be listed were used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Nathan Koskella Cabinet Officer Camden Council 5 Pancras Square London N1C 4AG Email: Nathan.Koskella@camden.gov.uk</p>	
RECOMMENDATIONS: <p>The Housing Scrutiny Committee is asked to:</p> <p>(i) Note and comment on the report.</p>	
<p>Signed</p>  <p>Councillor Meric Apak Cabinet Member for Better Homes</p> <p>13 February 2024</p>	

Section 1: Introduction

- 1.1. As the Cabinet member for housing in Camden Council, it is my privilege to present this annual report to the housing scrutiny committee.
- 1.2. Over the past year, we have faced significant challenges in ensuring the delivery of safe and affordable housing to our residents. From chronic underfunding to the pressing need for repairs and maintenance, the landscape of housing in our community is fraught with obstacles that demand our urgent attention. In this report, I set out our achievements, the work we are doing, and I aim to provide a candid assessment of the difficulties we have encountered, outlining my proposed strategies to address these challenges head-on.
- 1.3. I am committed to working collaboratively with all stakeholders to navigate these complexities and to ensure that every resident in Camden has access to the secure and high-quality housing they deserve – housing that is safe, warm and dry.
- 1.4. This report covers approximately the calendar year of 2023 and into 2024.

Section 2: Landlord Services and Tenant Support Update

- 2.1. It has been a challenging year with increased demand for our services. However, we have made some inroads into several areas of work.
- 2.2. We have prioritised the carrying out of case reviews in areas such as domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour to make sure we are managing risk and giving a consistent response. We have recruited four new officers to work on issues of anti-social behaviour on estates.
- 2.3. In response to our Fire Risk-Management Actions (FRAs), we have mobilised teams on our blocks and estates to address these risks and ensure that our communal areas are safe.
- 2.4. We continue to support our residents, some of whom are very vulnerable, engaging with partner agencies to ensure their ongoing wellbeing. (*See below, Section 10, for further information on our work to help vulnerable residents.*)

- 2.5. We have also engaged with residents through our Intensive Tenant Participation Programme (ITPP), with expanded door-knocking and the provision of our support at pop-up events, which have been very well received. More on the ITPP is discussed in many sections of this report, below.

Section 3: Estate Management Updates

Expanding the Caretaking Support and Response team

- 3.1. The caretaking service continues to offer a very visible presence on our estates.
- 3.2. Our 2023 support and response team pilot has been extended to the end of March 2024. We will be reviewing the outcomes and looking at how best we can make use of our resources in line with our overall housing transformation efforts.

Introduction of Traffic Management Orders on Estate Land

- 3.3. Following the identification of nine sites, informal consultation for Traffic Management Orders has now been completed and reviewed. The service is now preparing a report to progress toward statutory consultation for these sites, including a request to delegate authority to the Head of Neighbourhoods to ensure a speedy rollout of the schemes subject to considering the statutory consultation.
- 3.4. This was done in response to ongoing concerns regarding inability to enforce against illegal parking on our estates. The plan now is to roll out an on-street parking regime on our estates, following on from the successful trial on Maiden Lane Estate, where lessons have been learnt and mitigation implemented.

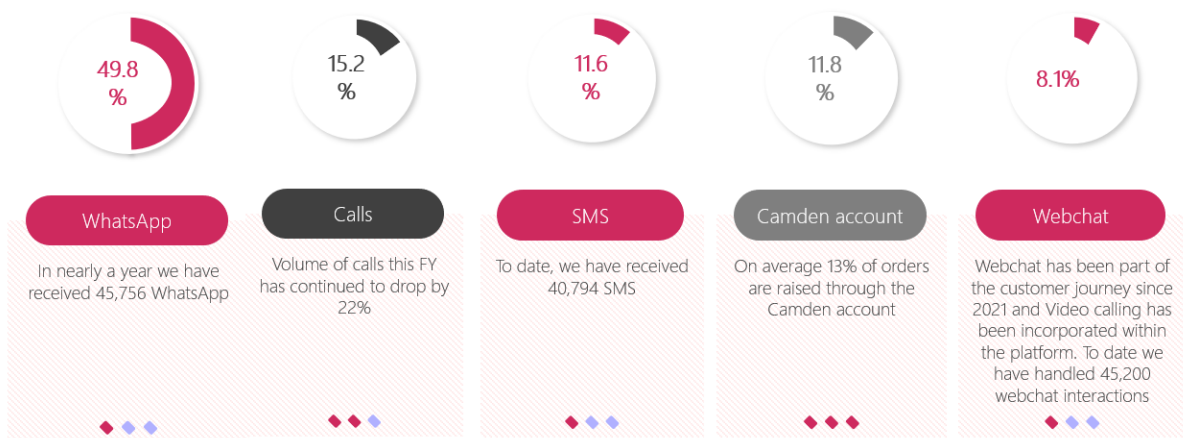
Section 4: Property Engagement and Customer Services, including Capital Works and Repairs

- 4.1. **Housing Repairs Contact Centre:** The Repairs customer service team offers an omnichannel service, allowing customers to contact at any time by whichever medium is most convenient method for them, including: the resident's online account, WhatsApp, SMS, Webchat, or telephone. The total number of customer conversations this year has been 242,989. We have brought all housing management and repairs complaints under a single section to improve consistency and speed of response.

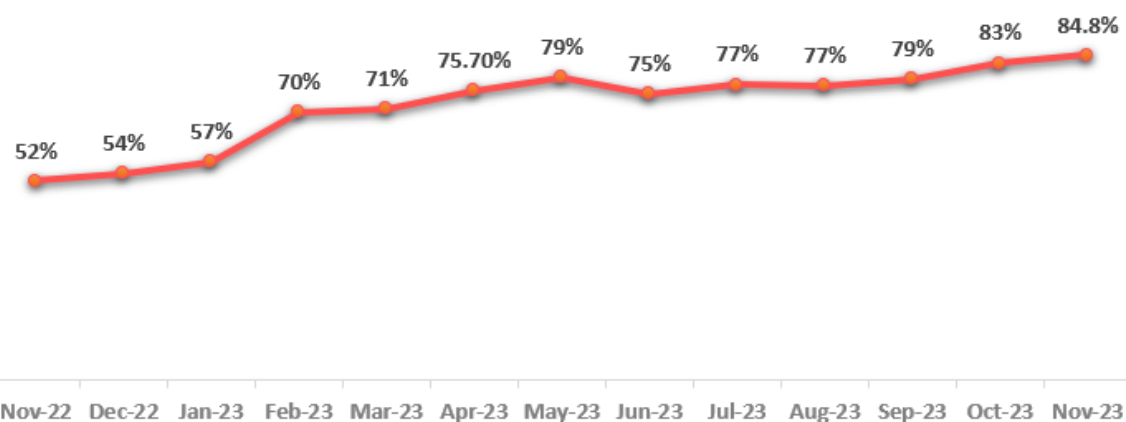
- 4.2. Throughout 2023, there continued to be a total channel shift whereby customers have chosen the most popular method to be WhatsApp; in the last month alone, we handled 8,500 WhatsApp interactions.
- 4.3. One of the main reasons we identify for why WhatsApp is now the most popular channel is the convenience of messaging at a suitable time and the ability to attach photo/video evidence of the problem at hand. Phone interactions have dropped from 350,000 two years ago to 140,000 this year.

HOUSING REPAIRS CUSTOMER SERVICE

% OF ORDERS RAISED BY DIFFERENT CHANNELS



Percentage of orders raised through non telephony channels



- 4.4. In autumn 2023, the team started an important project of transforming and replacing the customer online account to one with better design and integration, which our new Made Tech partner's product will be able to provide.
- 4.5. The team have attended discovery and kick-off meetings with Made Tech, and show and tell with organisations that have implemented it. We are hopeful that this product will be ready at the start of the next financial year for Camden's residents. This should dramatically change how the reporting of repairs is currently done by providing better technology for customers to self-serve through a much easier-to-use interface, aligned with national government design standards.
- 4.6. Additionally, in 2023 we were able to meet rising demand for new high-priority work for our service and organisation on damp and mould. We were able to quickly set up direct channels of contact either via telephony, Webchat, online form, or email to the dedicated Damp and Mould team.
- 4.7. The service identified and prioritised the most vulnerable group and contacted them directly through KWEST to identify and deal with mould issues in the property. We also followed up with the same group to ensure that any mould issues had been dealt with.
- 4.8. At the same time, we ensured customer feedback for this work was captured throughout and dealt with by a dedicated team and ensured that a follow-up survey was carried out with this work.
- 4.9. Customer feedback continues to be central to the service we offer, and we capture customer feedback on all work completed. We tasked a team member for three months in 2023 to solely work on all customer feedback. By doing so, we were able to fix outstanding issues and highlight where any dissatisfaction lay with the service.
- 4.10. The service also continues to improve our digital products: the website content has been revamped; the telephony message uses a professional company as the voice of Camden; we can now send out targeted estate-level SMS communications campaigns regarding any communal repairs issues to the residents; and finally, we ensured a new backup system is in place in case Camden's telephony system were to become inoperative. This last measure we see as highly important, especially for emergency services work such as for gas leaks, lift emergencies and the like.
- 4.11. Finally, individual staff performance continues to improve throughout the service, judging from personal contribution evaluations that are measured and

shared on a daily basis. We have also increased positive recognition across the team, with team members nominating others for Colleague of the Month, weekly praise awards and several charity events.

- 4.12. **The Consultation team:** In 2023, we held more than 75 public meetings and drop-in sessions, collectively serving thousands of our residents and helping to facilitate two-way relational conversations between Camden colleagues and the residents we work for. These have been a mixture of online and in-person events, making the most of the different benefits each type of meeting can offer.
- 4.13. We have introduced a brand-new SMS update service for residents who rely on our lifts. This is proving to be a major improvement versus sending letters because, as residents have told us, by the time a letter arrives an engineer has often already attended and carried out work on the faulty lift. Our SMS service now lets residents know promptly if there is a problem with their lift and keeps them up to date when an engineer has visited and carried out repairs. We have launched this as a limited trial so far, but we will be extending this to more of our residents in 2024.
- 4.14. In 2023 the service celebrated the first-year anniversary of the Housing & Property Residents Panel, which has come a long way in helping inform our approach on a number of different topics. These include how we support residents through the cost-of-living crisis to how we make sure people are safe and feel safe from fire—and even pioneering a new idea for “Repairs DIY” tutorial videos. Based on this success, we have increased the number of panel members, increased the number of panel sessions per year, and increased the length of each panel session. All of this is to support the panel to be able to achieve even more in their second year, 2024.

Capital Works

- 4.15. **Capital Works Progress Update:** Contained below is a progress report of the work that has been delivered by the Capital Works team during 2023. The review outlines the progress of each project, which have been grouped by subject matter.
- 4.16. A large number of projects are in the process of being tendered or scoped, which are provided as an appendix (see **Appendix 1**). The wider Better Homes programme is forecast to invest approximately £50m in this current financial year with a further approximately £260m secured for investment between 2024 and 2028. Some of the completed projects are highlighted below.

- 4.17. **Sheltered and Temporary Housing Projects:** There are a number of sheltered and temporary housing projects that are currently being progressed by the team. Below is an update on progress of each of these projects.

Block Address	Status
Holmes road Hostel	Complete
North Villas full refurb	Complete
61 Kingsgate	Mobilising
Levine and Abbotts	Mobilising
Argenta House	Mobilising
Henderson court	Mobilising
10 Bramshurst	Procurement
154 Broadhurst Gardens	Procurement
180 Haverstock Hill	Procurement
Dartmouth Park Avenu	Procurement

North Villas

29-31 North Villas Hostel is a 5-storey block of three traditionally built London stock brick town houses, which had been converted into 42-studio flats (all self-contained).

Extensive refurbishment was carried out to the property including external decorations, repairs and decorations to windows, a full Internal strip out of all walls, ceilings, M&E services following a design for fully a fire compartment and compliant building.

The construction works included full fire compartmentation, releveling of floors including new steel joists, 38 studio rooms with kitchenettes and shower rooms, 4 staff rooms, an upgraded plant room and M&E services. The fire alarm system was upgraded including 2 automatic opening vents on the 3rd floors as well as new emergency lighting and a new CCTV system linked to our Camden network.

The approximate cost of the works was £4.2m majority of which was funded by the GLA.. Temporary accommodation team residents started to occupy the property from September 2023. Some photos are provided below.



- 4.18. **Better Homes portfolio programme:** Outlined in this subsection are the projects confirmed in the programme. The outputs of the latest stock condition survey are being reviewed and will inform what the forward programme for Better Homes will include for April 2024 onwards.
- 4.19. The following Better Homes projects have mobilised which are grouped by packet. These are progressing well and include works to a number of street properties, Derby Lodge, Monica Shaw Court and the completion of the works to the Tybalds Estate.

2. Project	Packet
236-240, 242-244 Royal College Street and 268 Kentish Town Road	RPK/1001
1-30 New Priory Court	RPK/1017
1-20 Stevenson House, 1-24 Greenaway House and 1-36 Edgeworth House	RPK/1018
117-164 Kiln place	RPK/1019
23 Gascony Avenue (flats a-c) and 28 Quadrant	RPK/1034
1-58 Primrose hill and 79-87 King Henrys road	RPK/1037
Street properties - various	RPK/1042
Monica Shaw Court	RPK/1043
1-95 Camelot house	RPK/1044
1-24 Calgarth, 1-32 The Chenies and Brockham house 1-17 / Rainham	RPK/1045
Derby Lodge	RPK/1060
Tybalds Better Homes	RPK/449
Clevedon, Parliament and Chester	RPK/870
Kenbrook House Phase 2	RPK/871
Kilburn Vale Estate – various blocks	RPK/1054
Ferdinand Estate - façade repairs	n/a
Regents Park Estate - façade repairs	n/a

4.20. **Retrofit Programme:** We are working up the programme and delivery options while learning how other local authorities have delivered similar projects. Demonstrator projects and pilot work consists of the following:

- **Belsize Grove** - 5-7 Belsize Grove is our current most significant retrofit project at a cost of £3.2m, the block is made up of 58 units and the project has brought in over £500,000 of external grant, as part of the upgrades some

dwellings will move from EPC E to EPC B. Works are currently underway and include replacing single glazing for double, installing internal and external wall insulation, and replacing current electric heater for higher efficient ones. Solar panels will also be installed to feed the communal electric supply. Project is due to complete in Spring.

- **Brooks Court** - 21 dwellings within the Brookes Court Estate are also undergoing a retrofit, the focus is to achieve EPC C by a fabric first approach, each block had been appraised individually to determine its best path to the EPC requirement. All the dwellings within the Brookes Court retrofit project will receive triple glazing, however some will also require a mixture of internal / external wall insulation, and loft insulation. The project cost is expected to cost £1.9m and has brought in £250k of external grant. Both 5-7 Belsize and Brookes Court should be complete in in Q1 2024. Project is due to complete in Spring.
- **Full deep retrofit of 10 street properties** - These were originally tendered via an external framework with specialist tier 1 contractors, the cost came back at over £100k per dwelling therefore this approach was rejected. We are now working directly with SMEs to initially complete the fabric upgrades in the first phase, and the M&E upgrades (heat pumps / solar) installation will take place in the second phase. Phase 1 should complete during Spring 2024. (Deep Retrofitting is a process where you look at a property's overall energy efficiency and use a combination of measures to improve it. The aim is to ensure the property is operating in the most efficient way possible, using the least amount of energy.)
- **Somers Town Future Neighbourhoods project** – We are delivering internal wall insulation to 50 homes with solid walls and this is progressing well.
- **Energiesprong** - Discussions with “Energiesprong” (meaning “Energy Leap”) on a demonstrator project to carry out deep retrofit of a small block as a prototype project using their technology and repayment model (comfort charge). The GLA have allocated ‘United Living’ as the principal contractor via the “RE:NEW” framework.
- **SHDF Wave 2 funding** - We successfully secured £3.6m of central government grant funding to retrofit 283 homes in 23/24 & 24/25. Properties to be included in this programme of work are being confirmed and retrofit assessments taking place.
- **Henderson Court solar project** - Planning permission has been obtained to install solar panels throughout the block Henderson Court roof, the generated

energy will be directed to the residents' energy meters.

- **Delivering at scale** - We are looking into options where we borrow money from financial institutions, allowing the Council to upscale retrofit measures, with residents rolling on to comfort plans which then creates a revenue stream to pay back the money. The comfort plan payment model will be designed to ensure residents are always financially better off joining the scheme.
- **Cost of Living Support for Residents** - The council allocated £175k in funding to support residents struggling with their energy bills through retrofit works such as installing draughtproofing, wall insulation by targeting those most vulnerable to the Cost-of-Living Crisis. As part of this package, Home Energy Advise Officers also attend residents' homes, giving advice on reducing energy consumption, as well as reviewing energy tariffs, finding better energy deals, etc. The project has since received further internal funding.

4.21. **Mechanical and Electrical Capital Works:** This final part of the annual review covers capital works on our mechanical and electric equipment and stock.

4.22. **Lifts:** As part of its capital programme, the Council has replaced 383 of its 554 lifts since 2010, addressing the oldest and hardest to maintain lifts first. The current capital programme has 37 scheduled for installation, these lifts are prioritised through analysing repairs data and advice from engineers. The upgraded lifts will incorporate the latest safety technologies, guaranteeing compliance with current regulations, with enhanced reliability, reduced waiting times and lower energy consumption.

4.23. **Communal heating:** The Council has 170 communal heating systems ranging from systems service for small blocks to large estate-wide networks. The Council therefore has to prioritise its investment and tackle the most urgent requirements first. A number of schemes have also been subject to lengthy option appraisal processes such as Rowley Way and Maiden Lane and we will be looking to progress these projects. Large heating replacement schemes are complex and require extensive works both in the communal areas and within properties. Once complete however they provide well insulated heating distribution networks and heating that can be fully controlled within dwellings. Over time we will also explore how we de-carbonise the communal heating network as technology develops. We also have a range of projects underway to improve the efficiency and reliability of our communal heating networks. These include:

- Maiden Lane

Air source heat pumps have been identified as the most energy efficient renewable technology for the district heating system. Our bid to the Green Heat Network was successful with a grant of £3m being allocated. This project is due to proceed to tender soon to meet the timeline setup by this grant, the works will benefit the whole estate. Resident engagement is due to take place during early 2024.

- Weedington

The works are currently in progress, this project will focus on the replacement of the total life-expired and failing heating and hot water distribution network pipework plus the heat emitters and controls within the dwellings. Works are due to be completed winter 2024.

- Mayford

The proposal is for the replacement of the radiators, pipework and the hot water systems within the dwellings. This project is due to proceed to tender shortly and will be mobilised later this year.

- Holly Lodge

Phase 1 of the works will focus on the immediate requirement to remove the temporary boiler. The proposal is for the replacement of the boiler plant room and sub-plants rooms for a more energy efficient system as it's nearing the end of its useful life. Planning permission has been granted and we are now in the process of tendering the works.

The M&E team have also completed a number of projects this year including works to address temporary boilers that have been in place these include:

Project	Packet
Brookfield and Croftdown remedials	N/A
Camden Road (217 - 255) plant room upgrade	RPK/944
Lift packet 6	RPK/820
Lift packet 7	RPK/821
Ludham school of mosaic heating	RPK/1084
Southampton Road 22-38 district heating and plant room upgrade	RPK/823
St Silas Street Estate Communal	RPK/274
St Silas Street Estate Individual heating	RPK/289
Tonbridge House 24-74 plant room upgrade	RPK/1020

- St Silas

The works to upgrade the communal heating system are complete. We have invested circa £8m upgrading the main boiler plantroom at Headcorn and the district heating infrastructure estate wide, 401 dwellings at St Silas will now benefit from a new energy efficient heating system that they have the ability to control on an individual basis to suit their own thermal comfort levels. Below are some photos of the new Headcorn plant room.





- Finally, the Mechanical and Electrical team are delivering a number of projects at the moment most of which are due to complete soon:

Project	Packet
30 - 53 Mornington Street Door Entry System (DMC funded)	N/A
Brookes Court temp boiler	RPK/1068
Great Ormond Street plant room upgrade	RPK/828
New Harwood plant room upgrade	RPK/836
Tybalds M&E phase 1	RPK/248
Tybalds phase 2 cip regen enabling	RPK/1047
Weedington district heating upgrade	RPK/1005

- And the following projects are due to mobilise shortly:

Project	Packet
Gospel Oak heat network – Royal Free works	RPK/1177
West End Lane Hostel boiler	RPK/1179

- 4.24. **Fire Safety Capital Works:** The Council has a robust regime for the completion of fire risk assessments (FRAs) with over 3,200 FRAs being undertaken every three years. The fire risk assessor will identify the works required and the overall risk rating for the block. The Council's fire safety team then reviews each FRA and actions are allocated to the relevant team. The bulk of actions allocated to Capital Works relate to items such as replacement front doors (FEDs), installation of door closers and other measures such as emergency lighting. A large packet is in the process of being procured to address actions related to the installation of Fire Doors (FRA packet 15). Projects completed recently include:

Project	Packet
Babington and Chancellors POV/ AOV	n/a
Cromer Estate cladding remediation	RPK/891
FRA Packet 1 - smoke alarms South of the borough	RPK/1056
FRA Packet 2 - smoke alarms North of the borough	RPK/1006
FRA Packet 28 – Heath St	n/a
Holly Lodge Mansions roof exits	n/a
Long Meadow Alarms	n/a

- 4.25. **Cromer Estate Cladding Remediation:** Homes on the Cromer Street Estate in King's Cross are among the first social homes in the country to have fire safety improvements completed using the national Building Safety Fund.
- 4.26. Camden Council has also invested £7million to replace the façades on Bramber, Glynde Reach, and Gatesden buildings with a new A1 rated cladding, using funding available from the Building Safety Fund. The recent completion of the project means that the properties are among the very first council homes in the country to have new cladding fitted since the national Building Safety Fund launched in March 2020. The Fund provides local authorities and the private housing sector with funding towards replacing unsafe facades on residential buildings that are over 18 meters tall.

- 4.27. On the Cromer Estate, the new cladding significantly improves the exterior appearance of each building as well as the quality of insulation for the homes - helping residents to maintain the temperature of their homes and to save on energy costs.
- 4.28. Since the works started on the estate in February 2022 the council has also completed masonry repairs and boiler flue works in each of the buildings. The works have been delivered in partnership with local residents, who were able to regularly engage with council officers and contractors at weekly drop-ins held on the estate and through regularly meetings, as well as a dedicated team to help with resident queries and an open-door policy at the on-site office. Below are some photos from two of the blocks.





4.29. Finally, projects in progress are listed below. A majority of these are related to the installation of alarms and are due to be complete by spring 2024 or soon after.

Project	Packet
162 Regent Park Road Communal Alarms / Emergency Lighting	n/a
Communal Alarms - street properties	n/a
FRA Packet 03 - FED and alarms South of the Borough	RPK/101 2
FRA Packet 04 - FED and alarms North of the Borough	RPK/101 3
FRA Packet 05 - Various FRA - Camden Town area.	RPK/107 9
FRA Packet 06 - Various FRA - Gospel Oak area.	RPK/108 0
FRA Packet 07 - Various FRA - Kentish Town area.	RPK/108 1
FRA Packet 08 - Various FRA - Hampstead / Kilburn	RPK/108 2
FRA Packet 09 - Various FRA - Holborn area	RPK/108 3
FRA Packet 13 - Works to address Bin chutes	n/a
FRA Packet 16 – Alarms Mullaleys	RPK/106 3

FRA Packet 18 – Alarms Churches	n/a
FRA Packet 19 – Alarms Ventro	n/a
FRA Packet 31 – Alarms Mayfair	n/a
FRA Packet 32 – Alarms Evans & Share	n/a
FRA Packet 33 – Alarms TJA	n/a
FRA Packet 36 – Communal Alarm Trentishoe Mansions	n/a
Holly Lodge Mansions CIP block alarms reconfiguration	n/a
Levita House FED (included in FRA packet 4)	n/a
FRA Packet 12 - Georgiana	n/a
FRA packet 21 - Snowman, Casterbridge and Mary Green communal doors and screens	n/a
FRA Packet 40 – Abingdon Close Roof AOV (as part of FRA packet 7)	n/a
Whitton, Rydal Water, Derwent - Gas pipe compartmentation and associated works	n/a

Section 5: Rent & Finance Update

- 5.1. Tackling rent arrears remains a key priority for the Council following a steady increase in the amount owed during 2020 amid the coronavirus pandemic.
- 5.2. The Council is clear that whilst it wants to be an empathetic and caring landlord, the level of arrears is not sustainable and thus our rent recovery needs to be prioritised and implemented.
- 5.3. A combination of factors has meant that tenants are increasingly struggling with their finances and the rising cost of living means that tenants are less able to pay their bills.
- 5.4. During the pandemic, there was also a shift in expectation and culture around rent collection, due to the ban on eviction notices outlined in the Coronavirus Act that was in place from October 2020 to June 2021. This, in combination with the impact of Covid on the implementation of our generic model of tenancy management, meant that rent collection did not have a focused approach and a proactive rent collection culture was not maintained across Camden.
- 5.5. In September 2022, a pilot to trial a specialist rent collection team was established to give dedicated focus to tackling rent arrears alongside intervention to prevent tenants from falling behind with their rent payments.
- 5.6. Although arrears continued to increase during the first half of 2023, reductions were seen in the amount owed during October and November 2023 and

collection performance is at 97.1% Year To Date (YTD), against the annual target of 98%.

- 5.7. Our upcoming housing transformation work will seek to establish and develop the outcomes from the rent pilot, and an improvement plan is in place to develop a proactive but supportive approach to rent collection. The actions in this plan will help the Council to ensure cases that “can’t pay” are supported to maximise their incomes quickly but will also enable teams to have access to enforcement measures that means tenants who “won’t pay” are encouraged to do so more quickly.

Section 6: Resident Safety Update

- 6.1. The Council's approach continues to be on listening to residents and working closely with them.
- 6.2. We also make sure that we are transparent about how we are performing in keeping their homes safe. We shared the 2023 Fire Safety Regulatory Notice we received from the Social Housing Regulator with residents, our Fire Safety Advisory Panel, District Management Committees and this Housing Scrutiny Committee. We have also shared the Voluntary Undertaking and Fire Safety Action Plan we have entered into with Regulator with the Fire Safety Advisory Panel and District Management Committees and published these documents on our website. The monthly progress reports on the Action Plan that we send to the Regulator are also published on our website.
- 6.3. All fire and risk management assessment (FRA) actions are in a work programme, with the Council focusing on the highest-risk and oldest actions first. We are installing carbon monoxide and hard-wired smoke detectors in Council homes, with the full installation of the programmes due to finish by March 2024. Both programmes are subject to residents giving us access, and legal action may be required to address the no-access cases encountered to date.
- 6.4. We have commissioned an independent audit of our Fire Safety Management System (BS9997). BS9997 is an update on the British Standards Institute criteria for the audit and certification of enhanced fire safety management systems originally published in 2019. BS9997 is designed to improve accountability and help create an audit trail, ensuring that the management of all stages of fire risk management can be tracked through robust change control processes. We will publish the completed audit report and pursue accreditation for our fire safety management system in response to the recommendations in the report.

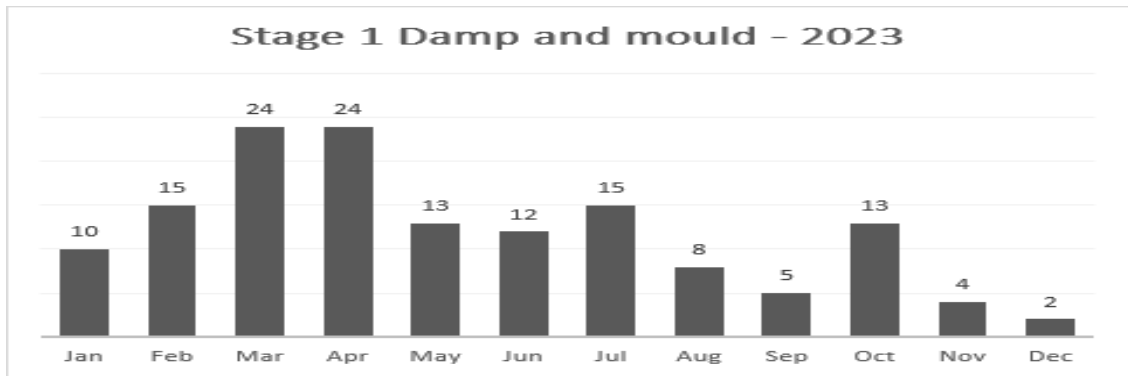
- 6.5. We have increased the number of Councillor places on the resident-led Housing & Fire Safety Advisory Panel to 7, with places for all political parties on the Council and which includes the Leader of the Council. The resident Chair of the Panel is now supported by an independent safety expert as co-chair, to increase the level knowledge and external scrutiny available to Panel members.
- 6.6. The Council has also updated our communal areas policy to ensure that staff and residents know how to keep communal areas safe.
- 6.7. The team have completed 58 external wall façade surveys to make sure that our buildings meet fire safety standards and to identify and carry out improvement works if they are needed.
- 6.8. We have arrangements in place to carry out annual fire door checks of 16,000 flat front entrance doors and quarterly checks of communal fire doors and flat front doors, to make sure they are in full working order.
- 6.9. Finally, we have registered fire safety information about our buildings on the London Fire Brigade portal to ensure we provide them with the information they need about the structure, lifts, layout and fire safety equipment in our residential buildings. This is so that fire fighters can respond quickly when they are on site in an emergency. We have installed secure information boxes with floor plans and other fire safety information in 168 high buildings so that hard copy information is available to crews when they are on the ground, in addition to any digital information available to them.

Section 7: Damp and Mould

- 7.1 2023 saw a dramatic change in how we deal with damp and mould requests. Starting in December 2022 and throughout 2023, we carried out a proactive resident communications campaign where we actively encouraged residents to contact us if they had damp and mould concerns. By the end of 2023, more than 6,000 residents had engaged with the service. More than 5,000 properties had a mould inspection, and more than 2,000 had a subsequent mould wash carried out. Based on the information provided, 90 cases were classed as 24-hour emergency requests, and 16 households required a decant move due to the seriousness of the mould in the property.
- 7.2 Today, the Council currently has 700 active cases on hand. We are receiving approximately 12 new requests per day, which has fallen considerably from the same period this time in winter 2022-2023, where on some days

approximately 100 new requests were being received.

- 7.3 A key piece of work completed in December 2023 was the council's self-assessment on how we are delivering our damp and mould programme. The Council first dedicated resources to tackling damp and mould in January 2021 and significantly reviewed its approach in November and December 2022, following the tragic death of Awaak Isaak in Rotherham.
- 7.4 The Council has also been keeping under review the recommendations of the Housing Ombudsman's spotlight report on damp and mould in October 2021 and its follow up report issued in February 2023.
- 7.5 During the second half of 2023, we moved to a more "business as usual operation" with regard to damp and mould, and made changes to offer a better service to our residents and work smarter. Instead of carrying out an initial inspection and arranging a further visit to carry out the mould wash, we made diary changes to allow the inspection and any mould wash to ideally be completed on the first visit. This slightly extended appointment length timeframe, from 45 minutes to 1 hour, meant that we were able to reduce the need for further appointments, eliminate the mould during the first visit and hopefully improve customer satisfaction with the service.
- 7.6 Additionally, toward the end of 2023 we trialled the offer of Saturday appointments for mould inspections and mould washes, which have proven to be very popular. As a result, this will now become a regular feature going forward.
- 7.5 In November 2023, following the Housing Ombudsman's determinations mainly on aged complaints, they advised us that they will be carrying out a paragraph 49 investigation into our handling of leaks, damp and mould, complaints and repairs. This investigation, which is not uncommon, commenced in January 2024, and we welcome the future opportunity to work with the Housing Ombudsman to deliver a better overall experience for our residents.
- 7.6 Complaints where the primary reason is 'damp and mould' have continued to fall throughout 2023:



- 7.7 To tackle the root causes and understand better why specific locations report more damp issues than other areas, we are collating and sharing property-specific feedback across repairs and operations teams to establish whether targeted ongoing support is required in the future. As more information is examined, a further report will be shared with this Committee to advise on the next steps.

Section 8: Chalcots Estate Project Update

- 8.1. An update on our Chalcots Estate Project is provided in the second appendix to this report. The Cabinet Member for Better Homes is very satisfied with the progress of the work and is happy to share the annual summary he received in full with this Committee (see **Appendix 2**).

Section 9: Tenant Participation Work Update

- 9.1. Establishment, encouragement and capacity-building of our tenant and resident associations (TRAs) and other resident groups remain an invaluable element of our housing and wider Council formal engagement structure. Post-Covid, we have seen mobilisation of more TRAs, with a number of new and dormant associations being re-registered in the last year, such as those for Tybalds Estate, Kingsland Estate, Maitland Park and South End Close.
- 9.2. Several TRAs across the borough responded to the call through the Warm & Welcome and Cost of Living initiatives. TRAs not only equipped and made their halls available for respite and social interaction, but also collaborated with a range of stakeholders, and in some cases with other neighbouring TRAs, to maximise opportunities to offer support where needed most. Gamages TRA, Holly Lodge, and Ludham & Waxham were very notable in this regard.

- 9.3. In the previous Cabinet annual report to this Committee, we advised as to changes to Tenant Participation with the team's main focus being:
- Drafting of a new Residents Engagement Strategy
 - Supporting tenant and resident associations (TRAs)
 - Estate walkabouts
 - Our Residents Conference
 - Facilitation of District Management Committees (DMCs)
 - Our intensive resident engagement programme
 - Resident training and capacity building
- 9.4. Work on the Residents Conference and a new engagement strategy are in train, with an anticipated completion time of spring 2024. Both pieces of work are intertwined, and are being co-produced with residents.
- 9.5. Between the summer of 2022 and the end of 2023, the Tenant Participation team facilitated 17 estate walkabouts, including 5 that were DMC specific, each with their own bespoke action plan. Teams are currently working through the range of actions, and a "lessons learned" exercise is being undertaken.
- 9.6. Work is also underway to consider how learning from the successful Intensive Tenant Participation Programme that started in summer 2023 can be incorporated into more sustainable participation and engagement work once the programme is completed in summer 2024. This may include further thinking of how estate walkabouts can better serve residents.
- 9.6 The Covid pandemic saw an acceleration of IT roll out and virtual meeting spaces for resident engagement. Of our more than 70 TRA halls, 45 have live internet connections (25 of which benefit from Community Fibre hyper-speed broadband at no cost), and 9 halls have been fitted with video conference equipment, with another 3 in train. Working with our TRAs and where feasible, we will continue to provide this facility for training, virtual meetings and social engagement to benefit our communities.
- 9.7 Working with TRA representatives, an online system for TRA annual registration has been developed and launched. The online system eliminates the need for printing or hard copies, with all documents available for download and upload. The system alerts officers to any upload submitted and then completes the registration process seamlessly. This not only saves time for TRAs, but also give consistency, legibility of completed forms and an auditable trail of submission. *The system can be accessed [here](#) in the digital version of this report.*

- 9.8 The advent of the new social housing regulatory framework and upcoming royal assent of new consumer standards in spring 2024 requires that we *“engage more widely and effectively, listen better and respond appropriate and timely to tenants.”* To foster this, and in keeping with our ethos of delivering services in a relational way, we have facilitated several subject specific discussions between resident representatives and officers. These include consultation on the Small Sites Programme, Service Improvement in Voids & Allocations, and the Heating Pool. The deep dive on the heating pool proved very useful for both officers and reps presenting an opportunity to further explore a customer-centred approach to the service. We anticipate more subject-specific deep dives to become a regular feature as resident engagement evolves.
- 9.9 The new fire safety legislation stemming from the Hackett report has placed considerable responsibility on local authorities and building management organisation. In meeting that responsibility, we have provided Fire Safety Awareness training to TRA reps and other residents with day-to-day responsibility for TRA halls and community spaces. Sessions are delivered by the British Safety Council in person, virtually and in the form of e-learning. This essential training will be made available continuously via our rolling residents training programme.
- 9.10 Since the last update we have delivered two *“Start where you live”* workshops, with a third planned for February 2024 at Dick Collins Hall, Regents Park Estate. These workshops have been well received by residents and staff, and act as a good prelude to engagement applying a community development methodology.
- 9.11 Working together with residents shall remain a strong and fundamental focus for the Housing and Repairs services.

Section 10: Update on Inclusive Access and Support

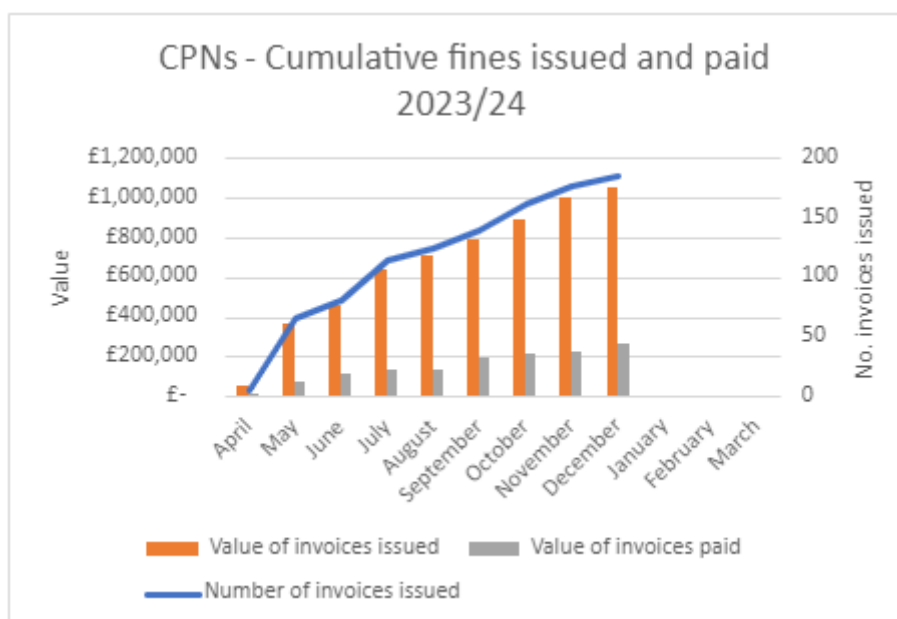
- 10.1. Striving to ensure residents have access to the support and services they need continues to be vital to our Housing and Repairs services.
- 10.2. The service improvements made throughout the past two years to provide alternative options to telephone repairs reporting for people with English as a second language, with hearing difficulties, or with other vulnerabilities that make telephone reporting difficult are looking to being extended to other services offered via Contact Camden.

- 10.3. Live chat, WhatsApp and SMS reporting of service requests are being considered along with new telephony systems as part of developments of our omni-channel access to support a wider range of residents and their needs.
- 10.4. Staff continue to make use of British Sign Language interpreters, as well as community language interpreters, to make sure that residents are not disadvantaged in their access to services.
- 10.5. Approximately 66% of households that the Council has placed into temporary accommodation have support needs. Knowledge of their specific needs or vulnerabilities enables the service to make sure that properties have suitable disability access as needed, communication preferences are accounted for, needs are considered in a holistic way, and that the necessary support is provided in order to maintain their temporary home, and importantly to be able to evacuate in the event of an emergency.
- 10.6. During service redesign deliberations, as part of the Housing and Repairs transformation, *all* teams have been considering how their services are inclusive of all groups and how knowledge of services can be publicised to those who need it. For example, the Camden Private Renters microsite on the Council's website seeks to reach everyone living in the private rented sector in the borough, and as well as inviting any feedback on that site, the Private Sector Housing Team look at various ways it can promote the site, e.g., to private tenants living on council estates as part of the Estate Action Days.
- 10.7. Knowing our tenants better has been another key feature of the housing and repairs service over 2023, as exemplified initially through the tenancy visits carried out by Neighbourhood Housing Officers, but later temporarily superseded by the Intensive Tenant Participation Programme.
- 10.8. This Programme has seen staff from all across the council visit over 4,000 tenants on many of our estates to learn about them, their immediate needs (if any), and their experiences living on our estates. Housing and Repairs services work will continue even after the Programme to ensure we are using systems well to record, share and utilise what we know about our tenants and their specific circumstances in order to better deliver more relational services.
- 10.9. As well as gathering useful information at the start of tenancies, the services will be paying attention to how the information the Council has about residents is easily updated as people's circumstances change, and they need support in differing ways. While information technology cannot be seen as the panacea for fixing all our service concerns, more modern systems will play an important role the services achieving joined-up working with various council teams and the use of resident data in the best way possible.

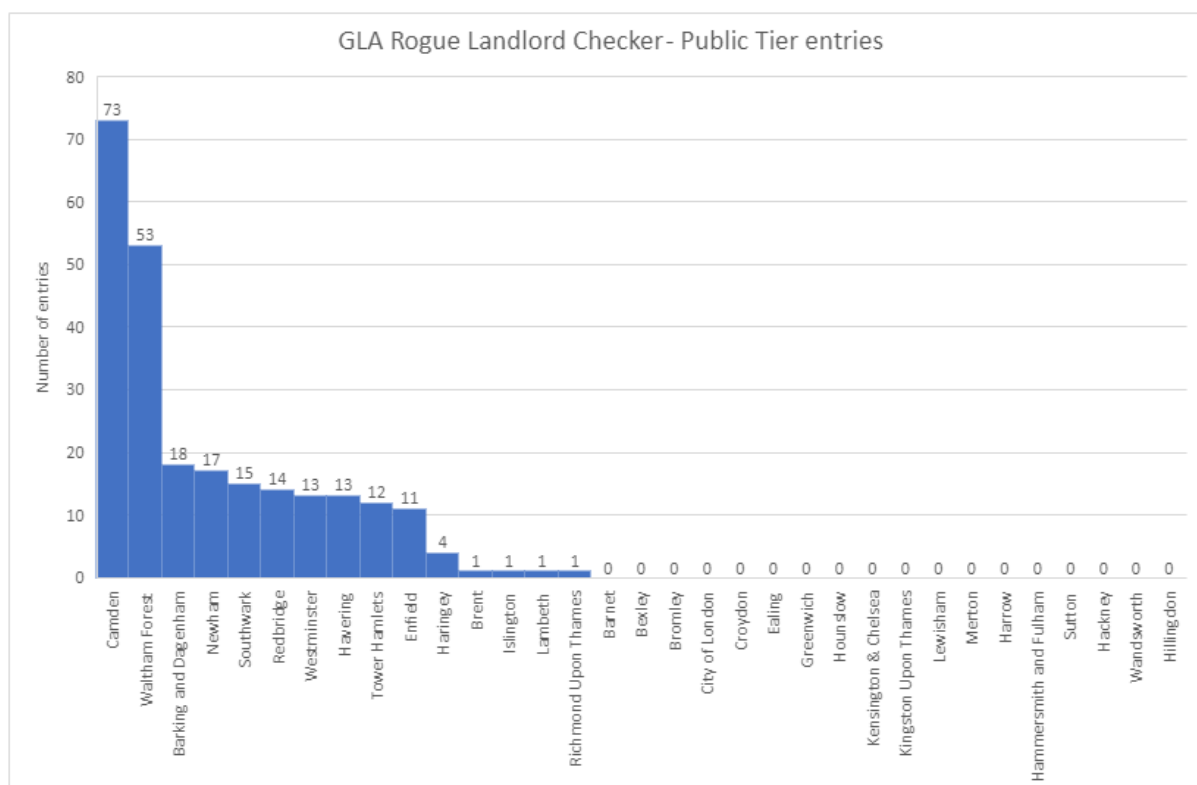
- 10.10. As part of the culture change to reduce any tendencies toward siloed working, all staff are being encouraged to refresh or newly undertake training in “Make Every Contact Count,” which promotes inclusivity and collaborative working in supporting residents.
- 10.11. Housing and Repairs services have also taken reports to the Disability Oversight Panel and have received wide-ranging feedback to reflect upon. The services are represented on Council and multi-agency panels or boards and use these opportunities to consider potential service improvements: such boards include the Camden Autism Partnership Board, the Children’s Trust Board, the Violence Against Women and Girls Board, the Camden Autism & Race Equality Network, the Deaf Access Group, Community Connected and Friendships Group, and various cost-of-living groups.
- 10.12. The services continue to explore ways of working well across the council and with partnership organisations to support the diverse needs of all Camden residents.

Section 11: Update on Improving the Private Rented Sector in Camden

- 11.1. There are more than 30,000 households in the private rented sector in Camden, accounting for 36% of households. Of these, 15% will be non-decent with 7% having one or more “Category 1” hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating scheme. Whilst the majority of private sector landlords in Camden provide good accommodation, there remains a number of landlords determined to exploit vulnerable tenants.
- 11.2. The service continues to use all tools available to improve standards in the private rented sector and create a level playing field for landlords. In 2023, 186 Civil Penalty Notices have been issued against landlords for a range of breaches, with fines totalling £1,052,570. Working closely with credit control, the service has recovered £267,802 in fine payments so far, with the final successful amount likely to be about 50 to 80%. Any fines recovered are reinvested into the service to fund additional enforcement staff and capacity.



- 11.3. Camden continues to lead on enforcement activity compared to other London local authorities. The service has recorded more than 70 entries on the GLA's Rogue Landlord and Agent checker, a tool used by renters to check whether their existing or potential landlord has been successfully prosecuted or fined by a council in London.



- 11.4. The borough-wide houses in multiple occupation (HMO) licensing schemes continue to bring this important type of accommodation up to a minimum standard. The service has issued more than 700 licences (new and renewals) so far this year, with 160 being issued for one year only. One-year licences are issued where on renewal the licence holder has been found not to have completed works required by the licence or other infringements.
- 11.5. The service held its first [Private Renters forum](#) in June, building on existing proactive engagement with landlords. The aim of the forum is to provide much needed advice to renters concerning their rights and informing them how the council can help. Two further landlord forums were also held with a range of speakers and topics, supported by regular newsletters.
- 11.6. Recruitment continues to be a challenge, with a national shortage of qualified and experienced environmental health officers (EHOs). The service has continued to build on its “grow your own” staff model by supporting a further three Council staff on the Diploma in Private Sector Housing Interventions run by Middlesex University. Our first candidate successfully completed the course in 2023 and has secured the first new Housing Enforcement and Licensing Officer entry-level post in the enforcement team.
- 11.7. Demand for assistance via our Housing Renewal Assistance policy continues to increase year on year. The team has approved over £540k in disabled facilities grants (DFG) and paid £622k so far this year, assisting 61 residents.

Section 12: Update on the Estates Mission

- 12.1. Our Estates Mission’s objective is that by 2030, all Camden’s estates and neighbourhoods are healthy, sustainable and unlock creativity for their residents. Projects and activities under the mission have involved putting estates at the heart of the Council’s work. These initiatives have encouraged collaboration amongst services and have focused on improving tenant engagement.
- 12.2. Over the coming year, the mission will focus on expanding our approach to radical participation. It will seek to foster collaboration with other Missions, including working with the Food Mission on community food-growing initiatives on estates, and building on opportunities to enhance partnership working.
- 12.3. Initiatives under the mission also include the Vacant Spaces Programme pilot. This programme’s aim is to transform Camden’s underused spaces on estates into places of community enterprise and connection. Currently, the

programme is focusing on a multi-bay garage unit on the Hilgrove Estate. Officers have been working alongside The Winch and Public Works to trial potential uses with the local community.

- 12.4. Also included is our Participatory Budgeting project, another pilot taking place on the Hilgrove Estate. This pilot was launched in 2023 with residents being given control over how to spend £200k of the estate's repairs, caretaking and green spaces budget over two years. Winning proposals, voted through by residents, include new sensory play equipment for children with special educational needs and disabilities; hiring a new apprentice caretaker; and new bin and bike storage facilities.
- 12.5. The Mission's Denyer House project has involved working closely with residents, co-designing to introduce planting and seating areas. An unused community hall on the estate is being considered for redevelopment for use as a communal space and possibly a Tenants' and Residents' Association. £40,000 of DMC funding has been secured to contribute to the costs of delivering the improvements to the hall.
- 12.6. Finally, our Intensive Tenant Participation Programme launched in summer 2023, aims to improve life on Camden estates for our tenants. Under the Estates Mission, the programme will involve speaking to our 22,000 Camden tenants to understand more about people's homes and estates, learning how we can jointly address issues to make them even better places to live. Each estate will have a bespoke plan of action made in partnership with people living there.

Section 13: My Priority to Enact Culture Change Throughout Better Homes

- 13.1. As Cabinet Member, I, Cllr Meric Apak, have agreed with directors in my portfolio a mission to reset the culture within Housing and Repairs services, moving to a more customer-focused and relational approach.
- 13.2. The top management team, working with Gavin Haynes (Director of Property Management) and Glendine Shepherd (Director of Housing), have in recent months been looking at what sort of culture is needed. This project stems from my conviction that "the way we do things around here" needs to change and improve to really help us achieve the short-, medium- and longer-term actions set out in this report and more broadly in Camden's Housing Transformation work.
- 13.3. Those actions are to maintain homes to safe, warm and secure standards; to deliver effective services that meet all regulatory requirements; to listen and

respond to residents' varying and tailored needs; and to work within the budget envelope, per the Council's requirements.

13.4. These are the things we need to do. And our culture shift will underpin how we do those things. The desired culture shall incorporate the following:

- A culture in which **residents are front and centre**, and where ways of working are relational rather than purely transactional.
- A culture of **performance management and pride** in the standard of work we deliver.
- One in which **decisions are data-driven**, using data, successes, failures and feedback from residents to learn, adapt and improve.
- Be a **culture of innovation**, which means looking to respond creatively to get the right solutions to problems through engagement, collaboration and partnerships.
- A **culture where kindness is the mantra**: where people work from the heart and make decisions that are good for Camden residents and that take their whole lived experience into account.
- Working toward a **'One council' culture**, where people collaborate and engage the relevant constituent parts of the council to comprehensively support residents.
- Delivering within an **outcome-focused and solution-focused culture**, where staff are encouraged and supported to use their initiative and creativity to work alongside residents to seek joint solutions, rather than feeling compelled to 'push things up the chain' for decision.
- And all this must be done **working within agreed policies and budgetary resources**. Alongside this, staff will be able to alert occasional times where a policy is not sufficiently supporting our service aspirations for some groups of residents.

13.5. Culture cannot change overnight, but I am driving throughout my portfolio a razor-sharp focus on building up and reinforcing the desired culture to support our transformation plan. I am confident that as new work processes drive different behaviours, we will see our changing culture develop more rapidly

13.6. I am happy to conclude my annual report to this Scrutiny Committee with some examples already underway of this culture shift and plan for delivery of our goals:

- In 2023 the services used a coordinated partnership approach to easing some of the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis.
- Work has already begun to improve our performance management and hitting of targets across all teams.
- Collaborative working within our Kentish Town Neighbourhoods Pilot.
- Positioning resident engagement as "everybody's business," exemplified by our Intensive Resident Engagement Programme of door-knocking, estate action days, and estate discussions.

- Our changing approaches to our homelessness, allocations, domestic violence, and anti-social behaviour work that are providing more tailored responses to people's individual needs.
- Work underway to improve complaint responses, including speed and transparent communication of response times, and to embed learning from complaints.
- Staff training that is being planned around topics including: delivering services to diverse groups; customer service; 'Make Every Contact Count'; complaints handling; creating self-managed teams; working within psychologically informed environments; and of course, managing data and tracking performance.

Section 14: Required Notations

14.1. Finance Comments: *The vast majority of the work set out in this report falls under the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and is therefore largely funded by rent and service charge income. Members of the Committee will be aware of the financial challenges faced by the HRA which were laid out in the [HRA Budget Rent Review 2024/25](#) report noted by the Committee on 23 January 2024. The report was subsequently agreed by Cabinet and set out a two-stage approach to put the HRA on a path to financial sustainability:*

- *Set a balanced and realistic budget for 2024/25, factoring in pressures while continuing to make savings and supplemented with measures to eliminate overspends.*
- *An update to the HRA's Medium Term Financial Strategy in Summer 2024 with further proposals to make savings over the medium term.*

14.2. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor: *The Borough Solicitor has been consulted on the content of this report and has no further comments to add.*

14.3. Environmental Implications: *This report to the Committee should contain no additional environmental implications for Camden. Our policies and strategies which animate the work described in this report are always mindful of aligning with the Camden Climate Action Plan, Biodiversity Action Plan and Clean Air Action Plan.*

AVAILABLE APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- **APPENDIX 1 (Capital Works)**
- **APPENDIX 2 (Chalcots Estate)**