

Camden housing

Camden Town edition

Summer 2013



Including Primrose Hill, Regent's Park, St Pancras and Somers Town
Local housing news for Camden Council tenants and leaseholders

Jazz in the square

Camden Square Area Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) celebrated May Day with live jazz from the Speakeasy Jazzmen, and a picnic in the gardens of the Square, the annual event is now in its ninth year.

John Cowley, secretary of the TRA said:

"It was a lovely sunny day, people filtered into the garden, all ages and backgrounds, to have their picnics. During the course of the evening well over one hundred people came.

"What is especially nice about the event is that people encounter each other, mostly local residents, in an atmosphere that is light and friendly, a relaxing moment in the life of the city."



Jazz picnic

Tenant engagement week

In May we held our first tenant engagement week. Council officers went on the road talking to over 1,475 tenants and leaseholders across the borough about how we can improve our services and you all had lots to say.

At a very blustery Royal College Street we spoke with over 50 tenants and leaseholders. As children came out of school, we had face painting and our stilt walker Bridie danced with the children while we talked with residents about how we could improve our service.

We targeted areas where there is no current tenants association. We will be looking at your ideas in detail and will feed back to you in the next issue about what we have changed as a result. Early ideas were:

- to text information about rents rather than send standard letters;
- to perfect right first time for repairs; and

- to go out more often to estates meet and speak with you on your terms rather than expecting you to come to us.



Bacton Low Rise demolition fun day



The Mayor of Camden, local councillors and residents of Gospel Oak came together to celebrate the start of the Bacton Low Rise estate regeneration project, which is being redeveloped as part of our Community Investment Programme.

The funday activities included: facepainting for kids, a rodeo,

crazy golf and a BBQ. There was also another chance for residents to see the plans for the regeneration of the estate.

Local resident Siobhan O'Shea from Weedington Road, said:

"The fun day was a brilliant day for the community, the regeneration of Gospel Oak is long needed, and it's really good to see that the Council are going to improve the area for the local people."

The demolition of the Bacton Low Rise Estate, Gospel Oak District Housing Office and Vicar's Road commercial units,

will provide 104 council homes, 10 for shared ownership, 176 homes for private sale and three commercial units. The sale of the private homes will help fund the regeneration work.

As part of this project the Burmarsh workshops in Marsden Street, which have been out of commission for many years, are being refurbished and a total of 13 workshop units are being brought back into use these will provide space for local business generating new employment opportunities.

We've been working closely with residents and tenants association on the estate over the past few years to make sure that they have an opportunity to tell us what they want from their new homes and the local area.



Perfect planters

Residents at Brook and Cranleigh House have been enjoying the new planters they chose as part of our extra investment in grounds and gardens.

Barbra Malik (shown tending one of the new planters) is one of seven new gardeners working to maintain and improve the planting and green spaces on our estates.

Leaseholders survey

HouseMark surveyed our leaseholders, in November 2012. 563 of you responded. You let us know that you are not satisfied with the services we provide.

61% of you were satisfied with the quality of your home but only 35% were satisfied with the overall services we provide. 19% were satisfied with repairs and maintenance and only 20% felt that the service charges were value for money.

We are taking these results very seriously and have created a leasehold action plan. The plan aims to tackle some of the reasons for leaseholder dissatisfaction by looking at:

- how we deliver major works where you live;
- how we consult you;
- our repairs service, including increase accuracy and transparency on bills;
- online access to individual information through the Camden Account;
- improved caretaking delivery;
- the process for making alterations to your property; and
- our customer service processes and standards.

You can find out more by visiting camden.gov.uk/leaseholders

How we are doing - your feedback

The results are in from our most recent tenant satisfaction survey. The survey was run by HouseMark, an independent organisation. 2,316 of those sent a survey responded.

Overall satisfaction is up

Your overall satisfaction with the service we provide has increased to 77% from 65% in 2008. 79% of you are satisfied with your neighbourhood as a place to live, up three per cent since 2010.

You also let us know your top two priorities are:

Repairs and maintenance: our Right First Time repairs service has now been rolled out across the whole of the borough, providing improved completion times and more repairs completed in a single visit as well as a reduction in missed appointments.

Overall quality of your home: Our Better Homes programme will invest a further £178 million in over 13,000 homes between now and 2017.

Where we can improve

However you also let us know you are not finding it as easy to contact us, with only 54% saying they found it easy to contact the right member of staff compared to 65% in 2008. We have started work on a new customer access programme which is running across the whole of the Council; we believe this will significantly increase how easy it is to contact the right person.

48% of you felt that we listen to your views and act on them. We are determined to increase this percentage and have started the process as part of our Tenant Engagement Week (see cover) where we collected the views of 1,475 tenants and residents. Keep an eye out for updates in future newsletters on both of these issues.

Here are some of the main results for the Camden Town area



Feel they are kept informed

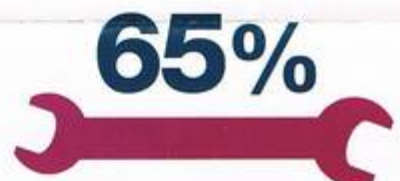


Satisfied with the value for money provided (for your rent)

65%



Satisfied with the overall estate services



Satisfied with repairs overall



Ease of getting hold of the right person

Housing benefit changes – help is available



Have Government changes to benefits affected you? Will you be able to afford the rent if your housing benefit drops? Do you have questions about the changes? We can help.

Central government's welfare benefit changes will impact on many households in Camden. These changes will not affect you if you are over pension credit age.

Since April 2013, council tenants who are below pension credit age, and considered to have 'spare' bedrooms by the Government, will have their housing benefit reduced. We can offer help to tenants who want to downsize, including advice and financial assistance with moving.

You can get advice on housing benefit and your options for downsizing at the drop-in sessions held in our libraries:

Swiss Cottage library - 88 Avenue Road, NW3 3HA

Drop in any time between **10am and 12 noon** on **Wednesday 24 July**.

Camden Town library - Crowndale Centre, 218 Eversholt Street NW1 1BD

Drop in anytime between **10am and 12 noon** on Wednesday **7 August 2013**.

A number of benefits are changing, not just housing benefit. You can get information and advice about all the changes by visiting www.camdenadvice.org

The Camden Advice Partnership is a group of advice agencies who provide free, unbiased information on a range of issues such as welfare benefits, housing, employment and money management. Visit www.camdenadvice.org to find out how you can make an appointment and access free, confidential advice

If you have any other questions about benefit changes please call Contact Camden on **020 7974 4444**.

Key amnesty

Changes in the law mean people who illegally sublet their council home could soon face prison or a large fine. Subletting a social tenancy without permission will become a criminal offence punishable by an unlimited fine and up to two years in prison. Landlords will also be able to recover any profit made through subletting. We will be making full use of the new powers to pursue the maximum penalty possible in each case.

We are holding a key amnesty from 1 August –1 October 2013. People who are illegally sub-letting their council home can hand back their keys without facing further action for tenancy fraud offences. The amnesty will allow us to get homes back much faster, saving money and allowing them to go to the people most in need.

If you have been subletting your council home and would like to take part in the amnesty contact us in confidence on **020 7974 5848** or email pst@camden.gov.uk If you think a property where you live is being illegally sublet you can let us know using the details above.

The big move to Maitland Park



Last month, residents from Wellesley Road and Ingestre Road care homes moved into our new, purpose-built care home, Maitland Park.

Residents are also moving into the 35 extra care sheltered housing flats in Gospel Oak Court.

We will now start the demolition of the Wellesley Road care home, where we'll be building a second new care home.

Annual housing conference

Join us for our tenants and leaseholders conference, an opportunity for you to tell us your views on the services we provide to you.

Saturday 19 October, Arlington House NW1 7HE.

If you are interested in taking part, contact hsu@camden.gov.uk or call us on **020 7974 5519**.