

Camden New Journal

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Costs for a leaseholder trapped in the middle

• CONCERNING high leaseholder bills, I would like to join the residents of St Alban's Road in expressing my frustration at having Camden Council as landlords (Leaseholders' shock as they face bills of up to £25k each, January 7) .

I have lived on the Holly Lodge estate for 25 years and owned my one-bedroomed flat for the past nine.

Over this time my service charge has trebled and it would seem there is no ceiling on the charge. We recently had major works done on the estate for which I paid £8,700 and am to expect internal work on the block in the near future with an unknown cost. Before the work was done, I asked Camden if there was a ceiling on the costs of the job and was told there was none.

I could itemise the bad window-fitting, the still-leaking roof, the arguments which go between Camden and Apollo as to which area is their responsibility leaving you, the leaseholder, trapped in the middle, but that would be boring. (In my current service charge breakdown I found I was paying for work that had to be redone after the works – meaning I am paying twice for work to be carried out.)

To get to the bottom of whether a job is fairly priced is near impossible. If you were to devote your life to it you might, after some years, be able to tell what is going on. But while your home is under threat from non-payment Camden's demands are very hard to argue with.

I do have in my possession an extract from a training manual Camden were using which I think would explain their behaviour.

The training manual issued by HOS (LBC) in around 2001 states:

"Right to buy leases could be described as blank cheques."

And goes on to say: "the secret for local authorities is involving leaseholders in the provision of the services and, just as importantly, being seen to involve leaseholders."

I think these statements speak volumes about Camden Council's attitude.

I would like to see a law which forces Camden to have full-time leaseholder representatives employed in the housing department.

However, I do have to say, in the case of the people in St Alban's Road. I think the work cannot be done without consultation and presentation of a section 20 notice which asks them for responses.

Otherwise, in my understanding, they cannot be legally charged.

WENDY HOUSTOUN

Holly Lodge Estate

N6

Good news...

• FINALLY, there is some good news for council housing in Camden.

Highgate ward has been awarded £3.6million by the Labour government for much-needed council works on the Holly Lodge estate and for the Chester Balmore estate in Chester Road.

This is in stark contrast to the Tory/ Liberal Democrat coalition's policy of selling

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