

# Camden Tenant

Established  
in 1972

Independent voice of Camden Council tenants

September 2009  
No. 187

Published by the Camden Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations

# Stop the sell-offs!

## MEETING

Reform of Council  
Housing Finance –  
What's best for  
Camden tenants?

**Monday 5 October**  
Meeting with Government  
rep, Camden councillor and  
Tenant views  
6pm briefing  
7pm meeting starts  
Camden Town Hall,  
Judd St, WC1H 9JE  
All welcome

**Tenants are determined to stop the sell off of council homes. Much-needed council homes including flats in good condition, and a whole block at Bel-size Park, are being sold at auction. The majority of people in Camden we've spoken to oppose this.**

Tenants are determined to stop the sell offs. With over 18,000 households on Camden housing waiting list, overcrowding and repossessions are growing. Young people can't get a home of their own. The Council need to stop privatisation and build more quality council houses.

Council tenants in Camden have repeatedly, democratically rejected privatisation as a way to finance improvement works. 'Nobody said they agreed with the council' when local paper CNJ did a survey (9.7.09).

The Council needs to join us to demand that Government deliver on its Manifesto commitment that all council tenants will have a decent home by 2010. Instead they are making housing problems worse, and letting Government off the hook.

The new Housing Minister announced 21 July new capital grants to meet the backlog of major repairs. Camden council must join with tenants to demand the money we need to improve ex-

## Camden needs more Council Housing and Caretakers

isting and build new council homes. 'They should be harassing the government on a daily basis', says Meric Apak, chair of Camden Fed.

Join the campaign: take leaflets, petition and posters round your estate, in local shops, community groups, church, mosque etc. Raise it at your next meeting and see your local councillors to demand they stop the sell offs now!



A lively meeting at the Town Hall protested at the sell-off of much needed council flats, while over 18,000 households are on the waiting list

## Councillors and tenants must unite to demand Government funds decent homes

**Tenant reps, the Council's District Management Committees, trade unions, campaigners and homeless reps have formed the 'No Sell Offs' campaign.**

We are pressing Councillors to unite with us in a Joint Deputation to the Housing Minister. Together we have a stronger voice to insist Ministers respect the democratic choice of Camden tenants, and delivers direct investment to improve all our homes and end the sell offs.

Government is consulting on changes to council housing finance. The Housing Minister said (30 June): 'We remain committed to completing our comprehensive decent homes programme and to maintaining this standard... Capital funding will be provided to support this.'

We need to hold Government

to this promise – not let them off the hook by selling off much-needed council homes to pay for other repairs.

Tenants are united to say NO to sell offs. Join us: insist Gov-

ernment stops rent robbery and ringfences our rent to fund improving and maintaining homes and estates – and stop privatisation of council homes, land and services.

## Council leader respects tenants voice – but says NO to joint deputation

Camden council leader Councillor Keith Moffitt put on record his respect for the work of tenant reps, and congratulated Camden Fed on our work. 'We fund you as an independent voice... I really appreciate the relationship we have with you. I know it is quite fiery at times, but it is healthy and I really appreciate that', he told our packed June meeting.

But the Council leader refused

to back a joint deputation of tenants and councillors to Government, to argue for help to modernise all council homes to a decent standard: 'The answer is NO. I don't think a joint meeting is the most effective way of pursuing this – you will need to pursue your own approach.'

Other councillors have agreed. After hearing a series of lobbies, the Council's Housing Scrutiny

committee chair, Councillor Philp, agreed to support a deputation. And at a lively Kentish Town Meeting, local councillors Nick Russell and Ralph Scott agreed to ask Council Leader Moffitt again, to back a joint delegation of tenants and senior councillors to meet housing minister John Healey, and to organise a meeting between the council and campaigners.

## No to Market renting

**Plans to rent out council homes privately have come in for a storm of criticism – and the Executive has yet again put off a decision on this. If we keep up the pressure we can make them drop this plan.**

**See page 4 New Council Housing funding promise**  
**Page 3 Don't privatise our caretakers**  
**Page 2 Protest at sell off of Homeless hostels**

## Don't close the homeless hostels

**Camden wants to close four homeless hostels, including the three largest singles' hostels.**

At a town hall meeting in August residents from a number of hostels and other temporary accommodation met with Frank Dobson MP and union reps to oppose the closures. Council claims that residents and staff support the plan were dubbed inaccurate; the consultation has been a sham according to many. Temporary accommodation residents say they have been instructed to move to private renting without any consultation.

Christine Burgess-Jones, as a hostel resident, led a deputation to councillors. She says the new Strategy on homelessness, called 'Moving on and up' is "not at all what it seems".

"In a nutshell, it is about closing the homeless hostels and sending people into the private rented sector, where rents are higher which traps people into benefits." Many homeless people come up against ruthless landlords and end up homeless again and worse off, as they have no waiting list points.

### Vulnerable

The hostel closures would push up to 180 vulnerable homeless people, some very elderly, into the private rented sector. They would be dependent on inadequate support services, particularly for mental health service users.

Camden intend to close or privatise still more hostels over the next 2-3 years, with huge job cuts in homelessness service.

Demand for single hostel places is acute, with only a tiny number of vacancies, and waiting lists for some places. Closures would leave the service in crisis.

"The total number of singles voids comes to only 18. Yet the Council are proposing to close large singles hostels. They have indicated that vacant homeless families' hostels could be used to house single homeless people," says Steve Sincock who represents homeless services staff through the union Unison.

With a Council tenancy, the tenant has a direct line of accountability with the Council, from the estate office to the Executive at the ballot box. Private landlords are not accountable to tenants in this way.

As hostel campaigners say: "The only solution for the homeless is stop the sell off of council properties and build/buy new properties."

## Capital works: is your block having major improve

If the Council is going to do major works on your homes, tenant reps need to get in early. Ensure the Council is consulting all tenants through the Tenants Association

Find out if your estate is on the Capital Works list and

- hold an estate meeting;
- invite councillors, housing managers and Camden Fed reps;
- demand to see plans for proposed works,

criteria on who gets what works done;

- make sure everyone knows this meeting is the place to find out what's happening, discuss the plans and have a real say.

The following Action Points were agreed in a Camden Fed workshop meeting on 27 April 2009 with the director from Camden Council, members of the Tenant Participation Team, and invited tenants and residents:

### 1. Communication

We agreed the need for effective, clear communications – such as

newsletters and tool-kits, in advance of surveys and works starting on site, and throughout the works. Camden council and its partners (Apollo and Lakehouse) have undertaken to review the communications material to make sure that tenants receiving works (and their representatives) are clear about the process, timetable, standards and choices.

### 2. Clear common standards

We agreed the need for clear common standards within which tenants would have choices and that the approach to resolving any disagreement about what works would be undertaken needed to be made clear.

### 3. Resident panels and TRA involvement

Where TRAs were in place, they would be contacted before works started on an estate and would play an active role in setting up the resident panel if they wished. There would be a residents meeting before works started.

Where no TRA was in place, the Tenant Participation Team would work to use the decent homes works and setting up of a resident panel as a catalyst to establish a formal TRA, and CamdenFed would assist in this process as appropriate within the terms of the NFA.

### 4. Strategic monitoring of performance

We agreed that the reports on

## 'National Tenant Voice': who will it speak for?

**The National Tenant Voice (NTV) is the new body set up by Government to represent tenants.**

Its aim, they say, is to put tenants at the heart of decision-making about our homes and neighbourhoods, and shaping housing and community services.

A national consultation proposed that NTV be an independent stand-alone organisation. It is now proposed to have a structure with three parts: a National Tenant Council (NTC), a Board and a Committee which should be accountable.

The three priorities that came out from the Consultation were:

- 1) Campaign for the provision of more affordable housing to rent;
- 2) Focus government attention on the quality of the homes provided (including the existing ones); and
- 3) Put pressure on the government to simplify rents, make them fairer and more affordable.

Apart from these, other important issues were:

- Tackle Anti-Social Behaviour;
- Get rid of the term "social" housing; and
- Better communication.

At the Consultation it was agreed to develop various mechanism to communicate information to tenants, for example:

- NTV Newsletters (freepost);
- Through official Tenants and Residents Associations and Federations;
- By email;
- Through landlords;
- Local TV and community radio;
- Community and faith groups, etc.

A Bill going to Parliament will give the government Powers to fund the NTV. Camden Fed hope to begin debating the NTV and whether it can do the job of representing council tenants, at our general meeting 24 September (see Fed News, page 4). This will be a preliminary discussion, before further consultation and debate across Camden.

## Why we ne

**Without Council housing most of us would not be living in Camden today – we couldn't afford it. We are here because tenants fought for housing – and councillors had the courage to listen.**

Historically the old St Pancras Borough Council was committed to municipal housing and built many new homes following the Second World War.

In the 1970s Camden Council bought up around 3,000 properties across the Borough. At that time property speculators were buying tenanted houses, planning to get rid of tenants and do houses up for sale. The Council bought houses with Compulsory Purchase Orders to stop tenants being pressured to leave.

In Camden Square between December 1973 and spring 1975 the Council acquired 67 houses, creating around 200 homes. This stopped the gentrification that



Signing the petition against Sell Offs at the C

## Tower block fire risks: we must make sure

**Tenant reps across Camden are calling for a comprehensive fire safety review of all high rise residential buildings, after the terrible fire in a 12-storey Camberwell block killed six people on 4 July.**

A letter spells out tenants' anxieties at the risk of similar fires in Camden's high rise residential blocks. It identifies measures to improve safety, and says a review should take 'full account of residents' own observations in relation to fire safety'

A fire in a Camden block, Oxenholme, on Ampthill Square Somers Town in May this year exposed the lack of any planned fire evacuation procedures or advice to residents and highlighted the

failure of the current physical fire safety system to adequately remove smoke from the building.

Tenants in Oxenholme, and across Camden believe the Oxenholme fire offers important lessons: '... the lack of a central fire alarm system to warn/advise residents ...the absence of any method of giving instructions/advice to families and individuals isolated in fear without information during the incident...impacted negatively on residents. Taking appropriate steps to overcome these and other identified short-comings could potentially reduce casualties, provide reassurance and prevent unnecessary panic in any future incident.'

Reps from across Camden are



The terrible fire in Camberwell, south London which killed six people in July

## ment works?

performance of the programme would be presented to the new DMC Tenant Monitoring Panel who may wish to involve DMCs directly in this process.

### 5. Timelines

We agreed to set clear timelines for achieving the above.

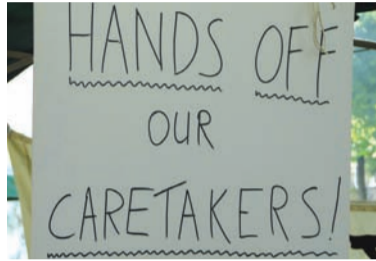
Tenant reps want to ensure the lessons of earlier problems on estates are learned, so we have no repeat of mistakes which left one in five tenants without information, and suffering disruption to their homes and belongings.

# Hands off Caretaking

**In response to letters threatening redundancy by Camden council, council caretakers have voted for indefinite strike action against threatened redundancies, with 60% in favour on a 65% turnout.**

This is a 'consultative' vote – the caretakers union Unison is now looking at holding an official strike ballot.

And tenant Henry Nakano of



Greenwood in Kentish Town, is taking legal action to challenge Camden's decision to award estate cleaning to Veolia. Henry

says: 'This decision is wrong, and not legal. The Council gave the contract to Veolia without any consultation, and without even tendering the work.'

Caretakers are key to well managed housing. Privatised caretaking means the service will not be directly accountable via the Council. Companies exist to make money, and cut corners and standards when they can.

Tenants want a well-staffed, improved and directly run caretaking service – and are opposed to this high-handed executive action. We do not want permanent staff replaced by temps and casuals on minimum wage: the direct relationship between tenant reps and local caretakers is key to sorting out lots of day to day problems.

## A voice for street properties!

by Petra Dando, Kentish Town Committee Member CASP

**CASP (Camden Association of Street Properties) formally re-launched in October 2004, to represent the interests of tenants and leaseholders in Camden Council street properties.**

Historically, the majority of street property tenants and residents have not been represented by traditional tenants' associations and have been left out of important consultation exercises. This undoubtedly impacted on the level and type of services delivered. It has also been very difficult for us to fit into the wider consultation mechanism in Camden. However the Association has now been afforded full voting rights of District Management Committees (DMCs) in each eligible district, helping to overcome obstacles to our involvement.

The Association aims to promote the role of the DMCs and the new access to funding arrangement ahead of its 2009 AGM.

Since our relaunch CASP has successfully worked to make sure we are organised to meet our members' general and wider needs. As well as focusing on borough-wide issues affecting LBC street properties, we have looked at how services, at a district level, can be improved. This work is being supported through district meetings and street property walkabouts which have helped identify large numbers of local issues now being addressed at district and borough-wide level.

Part of CASP's work has been to try and establish a representative in each district (Gospel Oak, Hampstead, Kentish Town, Camden Town and Holborn) to work closely with the Heads of Services on issues affecting our homes. We will continue to develop and publicise this role ahead of the Association's 2009 AGM.

Another important task has been to collect up to date information and data on issues affecting those living in Camden street properties.

Following a CASP deputation on 26 May 2009 Housing and Adult Social Care (HASC) Scrutiny formally agreed their committee, made up of elected, cross-party Councillors, would 'scrutinise' housing services delivered to tenants and residents in street properties.

We expect them to examine

# eed Council Housing



Camden Square summer festival

happened in other boroughs.

The Council must stop selling Council housing to fund its decent homes policy. It needs to recognise the social significance of Council-owned housing in helping to maintain a balanced community.

Compare Camden's history of building and creating new council housing, with today's council, struggling to put new kitchens or boilers into 3,400 flats this year.

- In 1949 Camden built 677 new council homes (amid post-war austerity) and continued to complete at least one home a day, finishing 2000 new homes by 1955 (before Regents Park and other large estates added massively to that number).

- Between 1945 and 1960, 111,976 new homes were built in London according to the GLC. Half a million people were rehoused in that time.

- By 1975 Camden's housing

strategy accepted that 'meeting single people's needs is a legitimate aim of council policy' (Camden's Housing Strategy 1975)

- 1975 -1978. Camden bought 6,494 housing units (as the recession was beginning to bite). Of these 2722 were empty and extensively re-modernised. (Camden HIP 1978/79)

- By 1979 (Camden HIP 1978/79): 46% of Camden's housing stock was in public ownership and this percentage was expected to continue rising. Council homes included 16,385 purpose built and 11,337 purchased. Of these 50% built before 1939, 41% 1945-70, 9% 1970-79. Waiting list was 10,000 with 250 new people added each month.

How do these figures compare with today? We have over 18,000 people on the Council housing waiting list, and yet the council willingly sell off council homes at auction to the highest bidder.

## it can't happen here

calling on Camden Housing department to urgently undertake a comprehensive fire safety review of all high rise residential buildings in conjunction with the London Fire Brigade and other relevant safety agencies. This should take full account of residents' own observations, and all residents should be provided with up to date fire evacuation procedures relating to their own building.

### FIRE CODE

- Take care when cooking with hot oil and think about using thermostatically-controlled deep fat fryers;
- Never leave lit candles unattended;

- Ensure cigarettes are stubbed out and disposed of carefully;
- Never smoke in bed;
- Keep matches and lighters away from children;
- Keep clothing away from heating appliances;
- Take care in the kitchen. Accidents whilst cooking account for 59% of fires in the home;
- Take special care when you are tired or when you've been drinking;

Half of all deaths in domestic fires happen between 10pm and 8am.

### Make an escape plan

In the event of a fire in your home, an escape plan can mean the difference between life and death.

## Camden in bloom



Mike Cookson-Taylor receiving Camden in Bloom award for 'Best Wildlife-friendly Garden'. Mike was also declared 2009 Camden in Bloom champion.

>>> continued from page 3

services to remedy noise nuisance/pollution, community safety, and general housing management issues including the impact on communities of council sell-offs of empty street properties.

A formal report is expected to be presented to the HASC scrutiny committee on 13 October 2009.

CASP is also a formal member of the Camden Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations (CFTRA) and aims to work with the Fed to support its general aims and objectives.

For more information about the Association, or if you would like to get more involved, please go to [www.camdenassociationof-streetproperties.org.uk](http://www.camdenassociationof-streetproperties.org.uk), or e-mail the CASP Committee direct at [camdenstreetproperties@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:camdenstreetproperties@yahoo.co.uk)

## Camden Fed news

### Fed General Meeting 24 September

6.30pm (refreshments) 7pm start  
all tenant reps welcome

Several new Reps joined the Fed management committee elected at a packed Annual meeting in June. This has strengthened the Fed and our representation and campaigns.

### Camden Fed Management Committee 2009:

Meric Apak (Artisan Dwellings)  
Silla Carron (Clarence Way Estate & Castle Road TRA)  
Mike Cookson-Taylor (CASP)  
John Crowley (Camden Square Area TRA)

Petra Dando (CASP)  
Charlie Hedges (Ainsworth & Alexander TRA)

Derek Jarman (Kennistoun & Willingham CIs TRA)  
Henry Nakano (Greenwood Tenants Association)  
Gillian Reeves (Leysdown, Shipton & Stonegate TRA)  
John Rolfe (Hilgrove Estate Residents Association)  
Carol Thomas (Sidings TRA)

Management committee meetings: 12 October, 14 December, 11 January 2010

All are welcome to attend General Meetings – next meetings: 24 September and 23 November

**Eid Mubarak!**  
To all celebrating the end of Ramadan

# At last! New funding for Council Housing

**Government proposals to reform council housing finance would scrap the national funding system, with councils becoming 'self-financing'.**

The historic debt would be re-distributed between councils and direct government robbery of rents and receipts would end. It is not clear whether the increased funding for management (5%) and major repairs (24% average) and capital grants for backlog works, is enough to achieve and maintain decent homes, and provide a 'sustainable long term system for financing council housing' as ministers promised.

## but we need guarantees...

If government deliver on these promises it will be a breakthrough and bring real direct investment in council housing.

But the 'self financing' proposals mean big risks. Breaking up the national system means each council going it alone. The Council – not government – will have to deal with any economic fluctuations or bad business planning, and some may go broke. Councils may try to push up rents or raid them to subsidise other services.

Breaking up the national council housing sector could under-

mine tenants collective organisation and make it harder to organise against privatisation, market rents and attacks on our 'secure' tenancies.

Tenants will not accept these risks without adequate funding and strong guarantees. We would need protections to ensure our rents and other money belonging to council housing is tightly ring fenced; that low rents are enforced, and there is a public-sector safety net for any council housing that gets into financial trouble.



United campaign: Housing staff join tenants at Town Hall lobby council for end to sell offs of council homes

## Camden new build: why no bid?

**Camden did not bid to build one new council home, with new government funding announced in June.**

The funding for 3,000 new council homes over two years, in addition to the budget funding for 900 new council homes, is a welcome step in the right direction. Bid criteria were tough, but Camden must make it a priority to bid in the next round, and build new council homes on empty land.

Government needs to step up the funding – currently what's available is a tiny share of the money being poured in to subsidise private developers and lenders.

We need a return to first class council housing as a tenure of choice – not to pit those on the

waiting list against each other. The answer to the despair of overcrowding, repossessions and growing waiting lists is to build enough council homes for all who want and need them.

Locally and nationally tenants

will keep up our united campaign to hold Ministers to their promises, and win the money we need to refurbish all Camden council homes – and build a new generation of first class homes for those who need them.

### How Fed can help

- Support to set up and sustain tenants' associations, including surveys of estates and helping core tenant groups organise meetings or AGMs
- Support tenants to organise themselves in defending their rights
- Provide an 'independent tenants voice' lead by grassroots tenants and their representatives, and campaigning on housing related matters affecting their lives
- Provide a resource centre for tenants with IT facilities, an Information Library, and printing and photocopying facilities
- Information and advice on getting things done.

### In brief

● Tenants want to know when their TVs will be able to pick up High Definition and 'Free Sat' signals. The Council say all homes will have it by 2012 but as tenants are paying for this service, and are being told to buy digital TVs now, this is too long to wait, especially for those housebound or isolated.

● Have you suffered theft from your home during Decent Homes work, and had problems when you report this? The Fed needs details so we can take this up – call us.

● Grafton (Area 16) TRA has just re-registered as an active TRA. It was first established in 1973 in response to modernisation programmes – it opposed the demolition of the Victorian houses in the area, and was involved in the planning of Cressfield and Woodyard Closes. We share management of Cresswood Hall with the Cressfield and Woodyard Close TRA and have been holding meetings regularly. Local issues concerning us recently include a nearby late night alcohol and music license application and the re-opening of the route between Arctic Street and Regis Road. Seren Quested

● Foundation66 (formerly Rugby House – ARP) can help if you are at risk of eviction or repossession because of drug and alcohol misuse (e.g. at least one warning from Council about breach of tenancy or lease). We provide planned support to individuals aged from 18 years (no age limit) for up to 2 years. Our team aims to improve the quality of life for the tenant or leaseholder as well as the landlord and wider community. Contact Barry O'Dea 020 7940 7112.

● Cressfield & Woodyard Estate organised an estate action day in June to clear up neglected areas of the estate. Safer Neighbourhoods Team, Grounds & Maintenance, caretaking and other council staff and others were invited to join local residents to thoroughly clean and clear the main areas of concern on the estate, that have been neglected for many years. 'It is an ideal opportunity for us to get things replaced, cleaned, painted, dug up, replanted or thrown away.' Refreshments & a BBQ were provided all day from the Tenants Hall.

Camden Fed

Camden Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations  
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