

# Camden Tenant

The Publication of the  
Camden Federation  
of Tenants and Residents  
Associations

Established  
in 1973

Spring 2005  
No. 174



# The Camden Tenant is the quarterly publication of Camden Fed, the Camden Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations.

## Established in 1973, it is the longest running tenant's publication in the United Kingdom.

The paper was first produced in 1973 by a small group of Camden residents who also set up the Federation. Meetings took place every Monday; one Monday was a Federation meeting, the following Monday was a Camden Tenant meeting. Once every two months this ad hoc group typed up and photocopied the paper.

Things have changed and now, in 2005, the Camden Tenant, the longest running tenant paper in the country, is ready for change.

This new design and format aims to be easier to read, give more information, while continuing to let you know what the Council and the Government are up to.

After 35 years of being a council tenant in Camden, Mary, of Holly Lodge Mansions, rang to say she had just come across her first ever copy of the Camden Tenant in the library in Chester Road, Highgate New Town.

She was full of praise for the content and design, finding it concise, an easy read and informative. She also commented 'thank goodness you don't use funny colours' as so many trendy publications produced these days make it very difficult to actually read.

The Camden Tenant has been going for nearly the same length of time as Mary's tenancy and the new size, design and format has provoked lots of comments, the majority of which are very appreciative.

The Camden Tenant welcomes contributions so if you have got anything you would like to say about what going on with your group locally, or housing generally, send it to us. The Management Committee of Camden Fed are the editorial board, and they have the final say about what goes into the paper.

# Camden delegation to House of Commons Council Housing Group

by Brian Pordage

**Tuesday, March 8th saw a delegation of Camden council tenants led by Raj Chada, the Executive Member for Housing for the Council, attending Parliament to give evidence to the House of Commons Council Housing group in the cause of direct investment into our homes.**

They were among over 140 tenants, council officers, councillors and Trade unions from 29 areas of the country. In all 19 areas stood to give evidence, including Camden, covering a wide range of issues. Addresses were also given by several MPs concerning their continual support for council housing. Several delegations, like Camden's, were joint Council and Tenant Federation or council officers with tenant backup.

Evidence was heard from a broad swathe of the country: Sunderland councillors were present to relate tales of their transfer which included bullying of tenants and lease holders alike and the new landlord failing to build new homes as promised. Tenants in Hackney were removed from the board of directors by their new landlord following transfer, due to their complaining of broken commitments and increased rents. Leeds reported on lack of consultation about demolition with the new ALMOs and withdrawal of local facilities for payment of rents. One sided and undemocratic consultations were reported by tenants from two London boroughs and by Sedgfield. A Midlands Council described how the standards of internal improvement works soon began to fall after the first few blocks had been done.

Both Mole Valley councillors and officers and Lewes Council and Tenant Federation representatives reported on their desire to retain their stock, Lewes had overwhelming support for retention and Mole Valley could even meet the Decent Homes Standard without external input yet were still being pressured to take one of the existing three options of Stock Transfer, ALMO or PFI.

An impressive body of evidence is now being drawn up by the Parliamentary Council Housing Group into a formal report. This will be submitted to Yvette Cooper, the new Minister for Housing.

The issue of a 'Fourth Option' will certainly be kept at the centre of the political agenda when there are so many tenants from so many different areas of the country determined to remain as council tenants, and with so many Councils supporting them.

Over 250 Members of Parliament in the last Parliament signed one or more early day motions in support of direct investment into council housing.

Why is Camden being penalised for exercising a democratic right to choose by not getting the investment it needs?

Article by Brian Pordage using information supplied by Alan Walter

Brian Pordage is member of the Camden Fed Management Committee and Lissenden Garden Tenants' Association



# Thames Water lowers the pressure

by Hilary Barnes

**In March the London Tenant Federation hosted an invigorating meeting between council tenants, the Association of London Government (ALG) and Thames Water.**

Thames Water had been invited to explain why tenants in tower blocks were having serious problems with low water pressure as a result of works they are doing to improve the old and leaking water supply systems. It appears that lower water pressure means that pumps are required to get the water up above the third floor.

The key question for council tenants is who will pay for the pumps. The ALG feels very strongly that Thames Water, not the boroughs, should meet the costs. Thames Water maintained that there is joint responsibility for getting water to a tap and that their responsibility ends at the property boundary; thereafter the responsibility lies with the owner of the property.

Tenants pointed out that the cost to boroughs for booster pumps is actually a cost to tenants through their rents and re-charging to leaseholders and, as they already pay Water Rates, council tenants are being asked to pay twice.

## Beware of loose cannons trying to set up Tenants Associations

by Meric Apak

I am sure councillors and Patch Managers mean well and work very hard when they set about reviving failed Tenants Associations and setting up new ones.

However I probably won't be thanked for saying; despite all this good will, the eagerness of one or two councillors and patch managers means council protocols are not being followed, resulting in unconstitutional inaugural AGMs, and Tenant Associations that end up not being registered with the District Management Committees, the tenants lead council forums responsible for, amongst other things, allocating funds to registered T/As from the DMC Budget, and advising the executive member for housing on setting rents and other service charges.

Steve Cowan, Deputy Chair of the ALG and a Councillor in Hammersmith and Fulham noted that his Borough had spent £200,000 in installing booster pumps to blocks of flats and that other Boroughs, including Islington and Tower Hamlets have also had huge problems.

Silla Carron, Chair of Camden Fed, went straight to the point saying 'It seems its taken Thames Water some 50 years to wake up to the fact that there is a problem and I still have to pay my water rates even though I'm on Benefits. The bottom line is Thames Water's job is to provide a service; the service is actually very poor. What we are getting from them here today is b\*\*\*\*\*t and I'm expected to pay for it! I say to Thames Water you have a big fight on your hands about this from council tenants.'

The debate ended with Thames Water offering to attend any of London's borough Tenants Federations and groups so to invite them contact the External Affairs Community Liaison Manager on 07747 641 213

Hilary Barnes is co-ordinator of Camden Fed

It is important to remember that the Council has farmed out the process of setting up and registering Tenants Associations to Camden Fed. We at Camden Fed are bending over backwards to follow this protocol when setting up or reviving failed T/As. I am now appealing to Patch Managers and Councillors actively interested in setting up T/As to please follow protocols established by the Council and work with the Fed in stead of organising phantom meetings of residents and confusing them even more, which in turn adds to tenant apathy.

Duplication of this work is wasteful and confusing to tenants. Please let us all work together.

Meric Apak is chair of Artisan Dwellings TLA and Management Committee Member of Camden Fed

# Surprise, Surprise... ALMO predictions come true

by Alan Walter

**Many Camden tenants won't be surprised to hear that the National Federation of ALMOs and the Chartered Institute of Housing have produced new proposals for Councils to give up a majority stake in the ALMO companies they set up.**

The NFA and CIH, authors of the report, are both organisations that are heavily dominated by housing chief executives, senior managers and consultants. These individuals personally stand to get big pay rises if their proposals are accepted.

The executive director of Carrick Housing, one of the first ALMOs, explains the logic: 'By about 2007/08 a number of round one and two management agreements will be up for renewal and Councils could end the agreement and the whole thing could just fold.' ('Inside Housing', April 22nd 2005).

Well, if they have done the job they were set up for, what's wrong with that then? Isn't that what tenants were promised?

When we argued that ALMOs were a two-stage strategy to privatise council housing we were accused of scaremongering. Tenants were assured that the proposed changes were really only a formality, there was no chance of the process going any further and that homes would revert back to the Council once the improvements were completed.

But as the first ALMOs near the end of their five year contracts there is frantic lobbying to not only make ALMOs permanent but also extend the separation. The formula proposes that Councils give up a majority shareholding in the private companies and sign a 35 year contract to hand over their housing budgets. The companies would then be allowed to borrow from the banks so that they could diversify and expand their operations. But the banks would of course be looking to safeguard their investments. They could insist, for instance, that rents increase, services are cut or land is sold off to guarantee their returns.

Effectively the company would be like any other Registered Social Landlord (Housing Association or Housing Company) except that the Council would still formally own the homes. And how long do you think that arrangement would last before they came up with another set of proposals?

As many of us said at the time of the Camden ballot it is clear to see that the government wants to get rid of Council housing. If we don't want privatisation then we shouldn't take the first step.

But there are also some interesting developments on a more positive note. Since the general election the Prime Minister has been in the news promising to keep the government's election manifesto commitments. On housing they have made a simple and unambiguous pledge. In fact it is stronger than the commitment on Decent Homes before the last election. The new manifesto promises: 'By 2010 we will ensure that all social tenants benefit from a decent, warm home with modern facilities'.

Whatever you think about the government in general we should all unite to hold them to this simple and clear commitment. 'By 2010 we will ensure that all social tenants benefit from a decent, warm home with modern facilities'.

That's what council tenants want, Tony Blair!

Alan Walter  
Peckwater Estate TA

# You never know when you will need your TRA

by Johnny Murphy  
and Cathy Pound

The Castle Rd Estate had had two Tenants Associations plodding along until an item appeared in the Gospel Oak DMC agenda in June 2004 that had us up in arms. It was a proposal to sell off, under our noses, a part of the estate to a Housing Association to build 11 units of affordable housing for rent. We repeatedly had to stress that we are not opposed to houses being built – but that it should not be on our estate. The land in question was described in the item as derelict garages and with waste ground on top – it was said to be a safety hazard as old fridges and cookers were being dumped there.

What was not mentioned, in fact, was that it was a purpose-built playground of 36 years standing with garages underneath. The garages were never used for the purposes they were built but the playground was the centre-piece for the flats where children and their mothers and the older people could accumulate and enjoy the fun of each other's company. There was a wooden train, swings, climbing frame, a miniature dolls house, seating area and a designated area for the older tenants. The playground had been closed over 15 years ago when health and safety regulations meant new safety surface had to be laid. The playground here, like many others never re-opened.

The tenants rallied round and started up a vigorous campaign to re-instate the playground, calling a public meeting which the Council kept promising but didn't arrange. Posters were up in our windows – the press were down regularly as we painted placards with slogans. A deputation went to a Full Council meeting at the Town Hall which was crucial in stopping the decision to allow 'disposal' of the land. We could not get a straight answer from the Council but were given a reprieve during which time we had to keep up the pressure. Finally after months of uncertainty, common sense prevailed and we have been given – we don't know for how long – time to start looking for funding ourselves to re-instate the playground. No money is available from the Council itself we are told.

To end on a good note, out of the bad came good, we are now, once again a united estate with a future to build for our children. The Tenants Association Committee is meeting once a week to keep focussed on our goal and we have achieved lots of other improvements on our estate as a knock-on effect of meeting regularly between ourselves and with the Council. The need for an Association on every estate is not always realised until something like this happens when the power of our voices is paramount.

Johnny Murphy is chair of Castle Road Estates TRA

Cathy Pound is secretary of Tiptree, Barling and Havering TRA

# Rents go onwards and upwards with New Labour

## Rent Restructuring

The government introduced rent restructuring in 2001. Rents are no longer set by the local Council but are set by a formula prescribed by the government; 70% of the formula rent is based on local manual earnings and 30% based on local property values. The government determines the figures for manual earnings and has produced guidelines for the valuation of properties. Council tenants in London are clear that this is a hidden Tax on council Tenants

The government's reasons for implementing rent restructuring were, they said, to achieve

- rents that are affordable and well below those in the private sector
- rents that are fairer and less confusing for tenants
- a closer link between rents and the qualities that tenants value in properties;
- removal of differences between the rents set by local authorities and those set by Registered Social Landlords.

It is clear that neither tenants nor local authorities have welcomed rent-restructuring. Hammersmith and Fulham Council were in the forefront of opposing the proposals and Camden Council delayed implementation until 2003; the London Tenants Federation, representing the views of council tenants across London, have consistently opposed it and ran what tenants considered a highly effective post card campaign in 2004. Cards were sent to the government stating 'affordable, fair and reflect the qualities we value in our homes? You must be joking.'

On May 12th 2005, London Tenant Federation invited an officer of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to discuss with tenant representatives from London Boroughs their views. It was clear that, although 'consultation' is said to be continuing, the views of tenants will be unlikely to change the governments decision on the options.

In case you were wondering why ODPM has not asked you what you think, they have given responsibility for consulting with all Council and Housing Association tenants in the country lies with the one tenant on the ODPM Steering Group, a representative from Tenants and Residents of England.

If you would like a copy of the London Tenant Federation updated briefing on Rent Restructuring please contact the London Tenant Federation at the Camden Tenant address or by email [sharon@camdenfed.org](mailto:sharon@camdenfed.org)



## Camden Tenant Quiz

No prizes for getting the right answer.

Which of the following is most likely to be consulted by Local and National Government?

### Individuals

single human beings as distinct from a group

### Focus groups

a group of individuals randomly assembled to discuss a new product, proposal etc and to give an individual opinion, view or judgement not necessarily based on fact or knowledge

### Tenant Associations Representatives

elected to act or speak on behalf of a wider group and able to circulate information to the group and get a consensus of opinion

# Hands off our tenants halls

by Lesley Carty

**Five years ago Camden Council tried to impose commercial leases on our tenants halls and their attempt failed after a storm of protest. Last year they launched a new attempt, and we need to make sure that they drop these plans now and leave our tenants halls as the valuable community resource they have always been.**

## Extra Burdens on TRAs

The draft lease would place unreasonable expectations on people who are volunteers. The Council wants to impose a particular form of hiring agreement, and a scale of charges. This would disempower communities – taking away our right to make our own decisions. We would be put under a legal obligation to keep our halls in good repair, expected to provide access at short notice, and obliged to keep hiring information in the tenants hall. These sort of clauses might be reasonable if we had full time staff managing our halls – but we don't. We're volunteers giving up our own time to help our communities. If the Council really intends to support TRAs, as it claims, then it needs to give us practical help, not just reams of guidance we have to comply with.

If we happen to have a hall which is defined as a 'large hall' (a purely arbitrary definition based on the number of square feet), then it's even worse. Under the proposed changes, TRAs like ours with 'large halls' would become liable for all the running costs ourselves.

At present all the running costs of our hall, from repairing windows to insurance to the electricity bills, are paid for by the Council. As a result we have been able to choose to manage our hall as a facility for the community and not as a commercial venture. We have been able to keep the hire charge low enough that residents on a low income can afford to use it. We have also been able to use the hall for community activities such as a children's drop-in and youth club. If we had to charge enough to pay our own running costs, all of this positive community activity and involvement would cease – either that or we would have to regularly let the hall for wedding receptions and other noisy activities which would drive our elderly residents mad.

## Market rents could be charged without warning

Then there's the question of charging us rent, which hasn't gone away. Read the small print and you find that the Council wants to retain the right to start charging rent if the income we make from our halls rises above an unspecified level. The Council seems to be trying to create the impression that there are some of us making a huge profit from our halls. This is frankly insulting.

At Templar House we manage our hall to be as cheap as possible. But if another TRA chose to raise thousands of pounds through its hall and spend this on the community we would absolutely support their right to do so. What is wrong with raising money through the hall and using it to provide social activities for senior citizens or young people? How dare the Council threaten us with a future imposition of rent when some arbitrary figure is reached that it's not prepared to consult us on now?

## Personal liability instead of democratic protection

Finally there is the outrageous suggestion that individuals should be made personally responsible as trustees for the running of their TRAs hall. The Council claims that it won't matter that the trustees would be legally liable for the debts of the association because the hall lease would only require debts to be paid up to the value of the association's assets. But what about other sorts of responsibility? Imagine the housing office being able to threaten individuals with eviction because as hall trustees they allowed noise nuisance therefore they're in breach of their tenancy...

Under the present system we are protected by democracy – it is the TRA which makes the decisions, not individuals. This protects people who have to explain why a hire application has been refused or why the charge is what it is. It also protects the community from the rogue acts of unaccountable individuals. With trustees who were personally liable this protection would be lost.

I refuse to believe the Council's claim that an unincorporated association can't enter into a legal agreement. When I asked to see the evidence on which they based their claim, so that it could be subjected to independent legal advice, they didn't produce any. TRAs can receive grant funding, operate a bank account, own property, insure our belongings, sue and be sued, employ staff, and sign hire agreements with people who use our halls, just like any other corporate legal entity. So if we need to have a legal agreement regarding the hall, there's nothing to stop the Council making that agreement with the TRA. There's no need for us to either become a limited company or appoint trustees.

Now I'm all for TRAs having proper legal agreements which protect our rights to run our halls without arbitrary interference. But all the suggestions in this consultation have been about protecting the Council's rights and imposing burdens on TRAs, without giving us any protection at all. Let's make sure we keep our community assets safe – in the hands of the community, where they belong.

Lesley Carty is secretary of Templar House TRA

# Reminder to Tony Blair — What council tenants in Camden want

by Derek Jarman

**So we know we have a 'New Labour' Government for another 5 years. Congratulations to both our re-elected Members of Parliament returned despite the massive drop in majorities.**

When Tony Blair returned to Downing Street he said that he had listened to what the electorate had to say during his whistle stop tour of Britain and that he would take note of what he had heard and would take in into consideration when setting policies.

Well, to help him and to also assist both Frank and Glenda – who have both been re-confirmed as mere back benchers – this is what the Council Housing Policy should be.

Tenants in Camden do not want an Arms Length Management Organisation. They do not want to be sold off to the private sector. They want the government to fully fund the repairs to their flats and houses. The so called 'fourth option', direct funding, is what we want.

We welcome the chance to talk with the new Minister of Housing Yvette Cooper about our aims and objectives.

As they say in all the best films 'This should be an interesting discussion'. We will keep you all informed if Tony Blair suffers from short term memory loss.

Derek Jarman  
Kennistoun and Willingham TRA



# Training at Camden Fed

Running Community Buildings Fundraising  
Investment options for social housing  
Tackling anti-social behaviour  
Involving black and minority ethnic communities  
Major repairs and improvements  
Where does my rent go?  
Running social events

and much, much more

Camden Fed administers the Councils budget for training for Tenant Associations and residents involved in these. Last year, we ran 4 training programmes and offered individual support to residents on computers, from the absolute basics through to working on databases and the Internet. One to one training on keeping the books is also available to newly elected TA Treasurers.

This year we are offering some similar, very Camden based courses, and adding on much wider training and other providers.

## The Fleet Community Centre

**When you've got tower block blues, having a nearby Community Centre like the one on Fleet Road Estate is quite a comfort. Its presence gives the neighbourhood a heart.**

The Fleet Centre, crouched between two tower blocks and next to a car park block, was once a clapped out launderette. In 2001 it became transformed by Council funding and local voluntary efforts into a well heated, multi purpose space with a shiny wooden floor, a kitchenette, an office and storage rooms.

The Fleet Community Centre may be modestly sized but it houses an ambitious programme of activities.

### What's on offer?

Letting people know what is available would mean sending out a mountain of paper. There are one day training events, conferences in London or around the country, residential courses, training tailored to your group, at Camden Fed offices or in your tenants hall... there are lots of options and there's money to pay for it, so give us a ring on Freephone 0800 652 3140 or email us at [office@camdenfed.org](mailto:office@camdenfed.org)

If you have access to the Internet have a look at the following Websites.

#### [www.traffordhall.com](http://www.traffordhall.com)

Trafford Hall, a centre catering for tenants from across the country

#### [www.pep.organisation.uk](http://www.pep.organisation.uk)

Priority Estates Project, a locally based organisation with years of experience of resident training

#### [www.actionlink.organisation.uk](http://www.actionlink.organisation.uk)

London Voluntary Sector Council, based on Holloway Road, offers a wide range of courses

There are keep fit, table tennis and yoga sessions. French, Arabic and Bengali lessons are on offer. Tenant Associations and Carers meet every weekday, and at weekends the Centre becomes a popular venue to hire for children's parties.

Although most of us are too old to join the Magic Mirror Drama Class, the sight and sound of it is a tonic. So is the impact of Jim Anderson's dazzling mosaic. Both of them help to conjure a dull brick and glass shed into somewhere with a bit of soul.

Chris Harbon      Fleet Community Centre  
Palgrave House      020 7722 8296

# About Camden Fed

Camden Fed, the Camden Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations is an independent voluntary organisation, established in 1974, working with council tenants and leaseholders. The Federation is managed by a committee of council tenants and leaseholders elected annually and is based in central Camden.

### Facilities

Residents are welcome to come in and use our facilities for work related to their associations. A resource room is available to type up minutes, letters etc. and produce newsletters. If you have never touched a computer before, we can give you one to one training. We also have access to the Internet and a colour laser printer.

The library has the latest housing publications including Inside Housing, Housing Today and London Housing News; the agendas and minutes of Council meetings on housing; details of training and conferences locally and nationally; where to go to find funding and specialist advice; and a wide range of information on local and national housing policies.

The Federation has a black and white photocopier for single and double-sided copying, collating, stapling, enlarging and reducing, and a colour laser printer available to all associations.

### Staff

There are 4 full-time members of staff. The Tenant Support Workers are Francis Brazil, Rick Harley and Mosadique Khan.

The Tenant Support Workers do most of the outreach and support work with residents including helping set up Tenants' Associations, providing information and advice, and servicing specialist groups and resident Forums.

### Registration

Registration of Council Tenant and Resident Associations on behalf of the Council is done by Camden Fed. Sally Fraser and Paul Fordham are the Job-Share Office Resource Managers and Richard Pearl deals with all Camden Fed finances. The co-ordinator is Hilary Barnes.

Camden Housing Department funds the Federation to carry out some of its resident participation work, particularly with Council Tenants Associations; and the Association of London Government funds a part-time worker for the London Tenant Federation, based at Camden Fed.

Staff are available to help during the day, and attend resident association and other meetings in the evenings. As much of the support work of the Federation takes place in the evenings, staff may not always be available for 'Drop-in' visitors, so please ring and make an appointment first.

More detailed guides as below are available from Camden Fed and on the website [www.camdenfed.org](http://www.camdenfed.org).

More publications are in production and translations into the key languages. Other formats and languages can be provided on request.

- Setting up a Tenants Association
- Running a Tenants Association
- Training programme
- Camden Fed Service Plan
- The Memorandum and Articles of Association
- Management Committee Pack
- The Tenant Participation Compact
- Complaints procedure: Camden Fed
- Complaints procedure: Complaints about Tenants Associations
- Back issues of the Camden Tenant to 1974

### Application forms

- Grants application form
- District Management Committee registration forms
- Camden Fed Membership form for registered groups
- Camden Fed Membership form for informal groups
- Application form for membership of Camden Fed Management Committee

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A company limited  
by guarantee

Registration No.  
3013493 in Cardiff

**Camden Tenant**  
Published by Camden Fed,  
Camden Federation of  
Tenants and Residents  
Associations Ltd.

The views expressed in the  
Camden Tenant are those  
of the contributors and do  
not necessarily represent  
the views of Camden Fed.

**Design**  
Carsten Klein  
[www.carstenklein.com](http://www.carstenklein.com)

**Print**  
Rap Spiderweb  
Lancashire

In memory of Rick Bull,  
died 20th May 2004.

Always in our  
thoughts.

**Camden  
Fed**