

Health and housing in Camden: experiences of local people

May 2019





Quick Summary

Healthwatch Camden interviewed local people about the impact of their housing on their health. We focused in particular on private renters.

We heard that:

- Housing issues in Camden are contributing to high levels of stress and anxiety which are detrimental to mental health
- Health and safety issues within properties are important but are only part of the issue
- Poor relationships with landlords and neighbours are a major factor in housing-related stress
- Stress about rent and security of tenure is common
- Private renters are less likely than social tenants to seek out support or to be connected to people or networks that can introduce them to services
- There is low awareness and uptake of available support services

The report concludes with five Recommendations (see page 11). These focus on: the need to better integrate health and housing at both the strategic and service delivery level; making support services easier to find and use, particularly for isolated private renters; and encouraging GP practices to play a more active role in connecting patients to support through Camden's statutory, voluntary and community sector services.

London Borough of Camden, the Camden Clinical Commissioning Group and Voluntary Action Camden on behalf of Camden's voluntary sector have all responded to the recommendations (see Annex 1).

Introduction

Local people told Healthwatch Camden that they wanted us to do some work to explore the connections between health and housing.

We know there are links between poor and insecure housing and poor physical and mental health. There is lots of information available to prove this connection. Estimates of the costs incurred by the National Health Service as a consequence of people living in poor and unsafe homes range from millions to billions of pounds per year depending on how they are calculated. We also know that the private rented sector houses a significant and growing number of the most vulnerable people and has the poorest standard accommodation. Unlike council tenants, private tenants do not usually have secure tenancies and do not have access to the kinds of support that is available to tenants in local authority housing. Residents in the private rental sector represent a third of Camden's population and this number is growing.

Aims

We wanted to find out to what extent the various health and wellbeing support services available in Camden can help reduce the impact of poor or insecure housing on the health and wellbeing of local residents. We were particularly interested in whether support services are meeting the needs of residents in the private rented sector.

Findings

Studies about the impact of housing on health have tended to focus on harm caused by unsafe homes leading to injury or physical illness. Although our interviews started with questions about environmental health, such as damp or hazards in the property, we found all the people we spoke with were keen to tell us about the wider impacts of their housing situation on their more general wellbeing, particularly their mental health. Stress and anxiety emerged quickly as common themes.

We heard about a range of factors that contribute to those pressures and demonstrate the ways in which housing and health are entwined. Social isolation and a lack of either personal or institutional support networks make it harder to access help. Vulnerable residents on low income who are in private rented homes are the least well connected group and therefore the least likely to be making use of support services in Camden.

Landlords make a big difference

Private tenants say that landlords have a big role to play. The personality and responsiveness of a landlord can be a hugely significant influence on the wellbeing

of a tenant. We heard lots of stories about landlords being unhelpful and we heard about some who are bullying.

“I’ve not got any hot water but don’t dare cross paths with the landlord.”

*“I can put up with some inconvenience in order to keep away from the landlord - the old *****.”*

“I have a panic attack when I have to call the landlord about something.”

We also heard what a positive difference it makes to have a landlord who is responsive and fair.

“If repairs and maintenance are done quick and with no fuss and if the landlord is proactive in making improvements it makes you feel supported.”

“I had a lovely landlord for a year and it made such a difference.”

“Having a decent landlord makes a huge difference to feeling well.”

The frustration associated with a lack of responsiveness was not confined to private renters. A housing association tenant told us *“the housing association are not able to, or have not been bothered to sort it out. They are very unresponsive, they don’t keep a record of what they’ve done. They are very slow at follow up.”* A council tenant reported that *“The housing office is not at all responsive.”*

Stress about rent and security of tenure

People in private rented accommodation told us that their housing circumstances are a major cause of stress and anxiety. Even people with secure tenancies and those benefiting from rent control still face insecurity around rent payment rises. People who own their own homes but are on low income report high stress related to mortgage payments and housing costs.

“With my housing I always have issues I have to fight.”

“Paying the rent is a stress.”

“You feel bullied and harassed. Threat of eviction looms large.”

“I have a secure tenancy as long as I keep paying the rent (although you are always still vulnerable to being moved out by trickery).”

“I’m worried about what I’ll do when I run out of money and can’t pay my rent.”

“It’s a regulated tenancy so I’m reasonably secure but I still got a threat of eviction letter. The loss of legal aid for tenants has made it much worse.”

In stark contrast, one council tenant told us: *“My home is good and it supports my health. I have security of tenancy. The heating works. I don’t find myself frustrated by not being able to get things mended. I know how the system works*

and I know how to get what I need.” This interviewee was also very well connected to a range of services and recognised every service on our prompt list of support options (see Annex 2: Interview questions).

Maintenance and repairs

Many private renters and housing association tenants described frustration about sorting out maintenance issues in the home.

“They don’t like servicing equipment when things go wrong e.g. the toilet took ten months to fix last year.”

“Landlords should be more aware of how long it takes to do repairs.”

“All these little things make life harder to cope with.”

“It’s been bad for my mental and physical health. There are problems in the building with damp and water coming in.”

“The woman downstairs has been labelled a problem tenant because she is always complaining about the damp, so now they just ignore her.”

We also heard examples of private tenants who are resilient and better equipped to take matters into their own hands:

“In my property if there are things I can do myself I will do them. I don’t treat it like it’s someone else’s property. If I can I will maintain it myself.”

Council tenants had some complaints but were generally more positive about maintenance and repair issues.

“The Council repair service is very efficient and well-organised.”

Neighbours, noise and other disturbance

Stress caused by poor relationships with neighbours is a common complaint. In the majority of cases this starts with noise and disturbance. Some residents report that neighbours are engaged in serious anti-social behaviour.

“Noise from the people upstairs is a big problem. I’ve had little sleep for two years.”

“We had a building site outside our sitting room for 2 years.We stuff the door with duvets to try to stop the noise.”

“There’s no soundproofing. The neighbours play music and make noise and late night sex – I can hear everything. I’m not getting any sleep and I’m going mad because of it.”

“I can smell cannabis and loud conversation. If I ask them to be more considerate I get accused of harassment.”

“I have a bad relationship with the neighbours underneath. They have a relationship with the freeholder and landlord’s company.”

“They rent out the flat next door (Airbnb or something) and the visitors use it as a dormitory. They have no interest because they don’t live there.”

“The neighbour takes pictures and sends them to my phoneand a long text message to complain. It’s very stressful. She complains if they [deliveries] ring her bell instead of mine.”

In contrast, good neighbourly relations support general wellbeing and reduce stress.

“We’re very blessed with our neighbours and it’s a safe environment. We’re in a flat so there’s a slight issue with noise because of the design of the building. It can be challenging but no-one is deliberately awkward. I feel secure and I know the neighbours well.”

Isolation

Tenants in social housing have a housing officer and may also have a tenants association or other support network to draw on. In contrast, vulnerable people in private rental homes can be cut off from the relationships or networks that might connect them to support. This increases their vulnerability but also reduces the routes by which they might be able to find out about and access support services.

“People who are in private rental accommodation are often very isolated and often they are single people on a limited budget.”

“Isolation is a big problem.”

“It helps if I have contact with someone - tackling isolation is key to finding services. I would like to see a housing officer.”

Very low awareness and uptake of support services

When we asked people about services and support we found very low awareness of what is on offer in Camden. There is confusion about what is available, how to find the services and who is eligible for support.

Our sample size was too small to support firm conclusions. However, among those we interviewed, people connected to a formal network tended to be more aware of the range of services available in Camden. For example, people who we reached through the Camden Federation of Private Tenants had a fairly high awareness of other support services, such as the Citizen’s Advice Bureau and the Law Centre,

although their knowledge was more focused on housing than health-related support. Participants in our focus group of older people showed very little awareness of any support services.

A small minority of people were aware of Camden Council's single point of access health and wellbeing offer which is called WISH Plus. However only one had made contact with the service demonstrating that knowing about a service is not sufficient to trigger use of that support.

"I've seen WISH Plus and it does look good and maybe they could help but I haven't contacted them. I don't know why. Sometimes you just feel stuck and unable to help yourself."

From our list of prompts, only GPs were recognised by everyone as a place to go for health-related support. However, almost no one believed that GP practices could offer any help on the housing concerns that were often an underlying cause of their poor health. Participants at our focus group of older residents laughed at the suggestion that their GP practice might assist them on anything other than immediate health concerns. The one exception was an interviewee who told us that her GP had referred her to the gym and been very supportive.

There was high name recognition of the Citizens Advice Bureau but several commented that this service was no longer accessible.

"I went there in the past but I don't know where it has gone now."

Carers support services, Shelter and the Camden Law Centre were recognised by several interviewees.

When asked about other places or services to go for support, a wide range of voluntary and other services were mentioned including, for example, The Irish Centre, public libraries, Age UK, Camden Disability Action and Centre 404. However, whether or not people had heard of or used the different services seemed random and usually the result of word of mouth introduction.

There was confusion about eligibility. In particular, private rental tenants often did not think they were entitled to access support services.

"I don't think they are for me."

"I don't understand what is available."

"I'm housing association, not council housing, so they probably can't help me."

"I have lost faith and confidence that anything would help me."

Contact with people and with services supports wellbeing

Although in the minority, some people reported good levels of contact, support and access to services. We also heard about the benefits of accessing general wellbeing support for people experiencing housing-related problems.

“I use the library, the internet, talking to people like the mental health services, and the carers group. I’m very well-linked in to loads of different places and I’m aware who I can go to for support.” Council tenant.

“I have enough support. I’m not working so I have lots of free time but I have to do activities that have a positive impact. I’ve also been at the other extreme- in my flat not seeing anyone for weeks on end.” Housing association tenant

“I try to help myself. I do yoga which helps and gets me out. I did a mindfulness course at the Recovery College and I’ve signed up to do an assertiveness course. I also went on a de-cluttering course.” Housing association tenant

“I am okay with knowing where to go. I know about the services that Circle 33 offer. They are actually quite good at the first point of contact. You can get through to someone. It’s just the next stage where they are bad.” Housing association tenant

“I go to the gym. I speak to people – colleagues and family and friends. A nice environment helps keep me well. Otherwise life grinds you down. I can have a bit of a moan to people at work or family or colleagues and they will give me advice. Access to public spaces helps. Once your health deteriorates you’re less capable of providing for yourself and it spirals downwards.” Private rental tenant

“The Carers’ Service is there and I did ask about financial things - they did things for me. I’ve been to meetings to help carers and they were quite helpful. In the summer, in the middle of my homelessness, I went out with them for a couple of walks to see other people, talk, walk...” Leaseholder

Good support is about people and relationships

Many interviewees stressed that good support is about individual people and relationships.

“It’s not so much about the service - it’s about whether you find good people in the service.”

“It often boils down to individual people and relationships.”

“You often don’t even know who your estate manager or your caretaker is. You need to be able to put a face to a name.”

“Where’s the human factor?”

“I reckon that’s why everyone is getting stressed. No one to help anymore. They just say go online.”

Loss of confidence and trust in support services

A common theme was that support services have declined and that the efficiency and effectiveness of services has diminished. People said that services to support them around housing matters have been cut.

There is a loss of confidence and trust in support services. Several private or housing association rental tenants described what they perceive as a change of culture to a pro-landlord approach.

“The Environmental Health officers are always biased towards the landlord. I called on them when I was in a flat unfit for human habitation.”

“The Housing Aid Centre at West End Lane helped a lot in the past but it’s not there anymore. At the time it was very well known and one of the staff was very helpful.”

“In the old days if I called about my housing conditions a social worker from the housing advice would respond. There was active signposting to support. It was pro-active in a way that’s not there now. There was a pro-tenant approach which has gone now.”

“The Law Centre used to be good but they won’t support tenants now.”

“There’s no one you can talk to independent of your estate officer.”

“They would all be better if they were more responsive. The places are always closed - the voluntary sector services never have anyone there.”

We also heard about a lack of responsiveness from Camden council.

“There’s been a decline in the way people are treated by the services. They don’t answer the phone. They don’t treat you with respect.” Private renter

“They don’t answer the phone, and if they do talk to you they don’t know anything.” Private renter

“These days it’s all a put up and shut up approach.” Housing association tenant

“The housing officer is not responsive.” Council tenant

“They treat me as if I’m making a fuss.” Housing association tenant

“In the old days you could call and actually speak to someone. Now it’s just a central phone or online. I miss the human contact. I can’t do it online - it’s not fair.” Council tenant

There were some notable exceptions. One interviewee who is a council tenant told us *“I know what I’m entitled to. I’m well informed.”*

What would help you make more use of services available in Camden?

We asked people for their suggestions and heard lots of ideas for things that would help residents to make better use of services available in Camden.

“A better support service would be through the GPs. If people don’t know where to go then the GP is the best entry point.”

“Phone directing - the Camden service should be more supportive and simpler.”

“There needs to be better integration between housing advice and environmental health (they are different departments).”

“Dedicated support on anti-social behaviour and noise. Facilitating better relationships with neighbours.”

“It would be good to have a proper complaints service for the housing association. There’s nowhere to go to complain if they don’t fix the problems. We need a visible and accessible escalation process.”

The majority of our interviewees said they were not regular internet users. Almost everyone said they would like more personal contact rather than online or automated phone responses. There was agreement that word of mouth is the best way to both learn about support and be motivated to call on that support.

“I do use the internet but not all the time for everything. Networking and word of mouth work best.”

“I want to hear a real voice.”

“Having a real person to talk to is really helpful.”

“There’s stuff going on, I think Camden are pretty good, but I think it would be better to get leaflets to tell you about what’s available. You get stuff through the letterbox but it’s mainly Camden Council magazine so it’s all buried in there. I think it would be great to have some TV shows or videos. Then you could see an upbeat real person telling you about these services. I think that would help.”

Conclusion

Five themes emerged clearly from our interviews. One: housing issues in Camden are contributing to high levels of stress and anxiety which are detrimental to mental health. Two: these housing issues are equally likely to be about poor relationships with neighbours or landlords as they are to be about health and safety issues within the property. Three: private renters are less likely to seek out support or to be connected to people or networks that can introduce them to services. Four: there is poor recognition and uptake of the support that is available in Camden. Five: residents experience a lack of responsiveness from both landlords and from Camden's services which has a negative impact on wellbeing.

We also learned about the gap between knowing about a service and taking action to reach out for support. Improving the advertising and signposting of services will not be sufficient to ensure those who need services actually access them. Strengthening networks of people and relationships and finding new ways to reach out to those who are isolated will also be necessary. The move towards efficiency through online and generic response pathways has led to a range of services that are segmented and poorly interconnected. The value of direct personal contact with capacity to offer flexible advice has been lost as services have been reduced and reorganised. This has contributed to a lack of responsiveness that is keenly felt by many. Finally, the potential of GP practices as entry points to community services that might help address the social determinants of health is not well exploited.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1: Camden must strengthen the integration of health and housing at the strategic level.

- a) Camden's Cabinet Member for Better Homes should become a permanent member of the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- b) Those with responsibility for housing should be encouraged and supported to think "health" and vice versa.

Why? *Housing is a significant determinant of health. The conditions that support good health include good housing. Creating these conditions cannot be achieved by either the housing or the health sector alone.*

The Health and Wellbeing Board is a high-level strategic partnership which aims to ensure a joined up approach to addressing the health and social care needs of residents. Yet currently there is no seat at the Board for the housing sector.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Camden must strengthen the integration of health and housing at the level of frontline services.

- a) Housing officers must be equipped to encourage resilience and wellbeing through “social prescribing” as well as meeting direct housing needs.
- b) “Contact Camden” must offer residents clear pathways to appropriate services and call takers need the skill and flexibility to also connect residents to appropriate community based services.
- c) Work to advance Camden’s new neighbourhood approach for encouraging community resilience and wellbeing should include housing issues on the agenda.

Why? *Many residents contact services with a housing problem which may be taking a toll on mental and physical health (particularly stress or anxiety caused by anti-social behaviour and poor relations with neighbours or landlords) or a health problem which may be exacerbated by housing issues. Ensuring these links are made will improve the responsiveness of services to support residents better.*

RECOMMENDATION 3: Camden residents must be able to easily find out about and access the statutory, voluntary and community sector services they need to keep themselves well. Services must be easier to find and to use.

- a) All services must use names that make online searches easy and convey the service being offered.
- b) Camden should develop more coherent points of access to its large and diverse advice and support offer.
- c) Information about services must be communicated in a variety of ways, including through online social networks and personal contact and including proactive work to target vulnerable groups.
- d) Camden Council’s website must be easy to navigate and include easy to find information about private rental sector housing and health related options. Cyclical and dead end or inaccurate links must be eliminated.

Why? *Camden has a wide range of good support services. However, these are hard to find for individuals who are not already connected to people or networks that can introduce them. Basic Google searches cannot easily identify what is on offer in Camden. Some services appear to be overlapping and poorly coordinated.*

Names are confusing and don't easily communicate the service offer (e.g. WISHplus).

RECOMMENDATION 4: Camden residents who rent their homes from the private sector must have easy access to London Borough of Camden and to voluntary and community sector advice and support services.

- a) Camden's statutory, voluntary and community sector services must make a more explicit offer to private rental tenants.
- b) Camden's policy work on housing issues should place greater emphasis on including the private rental sector.

Why? *Market and policy changes mean that many who years ago may have had access to social housing are now accommodated in the private rental sector. "Every resident should feel connected to their community and able to ask for help and support when they need it." (Camden 2025¹) Private renters have very low recognition of Camden's services and little sense of whether they are entitled to access services. Self-activation (the motivation and ability to seek and find support) is generally low for private renters who are more likely than others to be isolated and lack personal contacts and networks.*

RECOMMENDATION 5: Camden's GP practices should play a more active role in connecting patients to support through Camden's statutory, voluntary and community sector services.

- a) Camden's GP practices should consistently offer "social prescribing" including signposting residents to housing support services where appropriate.
- b) Camden's "social prescribing" offer must be clear, coherent and well integrated with easy pathways to facilitate GP referrals.

Why? *GP practices are the single universally recognised access point for health services. Many patients are experiencing poor wellbeing influenced by issues related to their housing situation. GP practice teams should be more proactive about "social prescribing" that connects patients to appropriate non-clinical support through Camden's voluntary and community sector or council services. Currently these services are disparate and hard to find which can make it hard for GPs to refer with ease and confidence.*

¹ *Camden 2025 available at:* <https://www3.camden.gov.uk/2025/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Camden-2025.pdf>

Method

We used a mixed methods approach to gather the views of local people about housing and health and specifically to seek answers to our question:

How effective are Camden's health and wellbeing support services in mitigating the negative impact of poor or insecure housing on local residents' health?

We began with round table group discussions at two public meetings – our Healthwatch Camden Community Forum and the Healthwatch Camden AGM 2017.

Next we held a focus group discussion with 12 older residents over the age of 65 years.

Then, between January and September 2018, we conducted one to one, in-depth semi-structured interviews with 13 residents. Each interview was conducted by individual appointment at a venue selected by the interviewee and took one hour. We recruited these interviewees through a variety of channels. We made an appeal on our website and via social media and we attended community meetings at which we spoke about our work and invited people to interview. We worked in partnership with the Camden Federation of Private Tenants to identify interviewees from the private rental sector.

The 13 interviewees included both men and women across a range of ages. The majority were over age 40. Three interviewees were black or minority ethnic.

We then analysed the responses from all different sources, identifying common themes.

See Annex 2 for the questions used to structure our interviews.



About Healthwatch Camden

Healthwatch Camden is an independent organisation with a remit to make sure that the views of local service users in Camden are heard, responded to, taken seriously, and help to bring about service improvements.

Our duties (which are set out under the Health and Social Care Act 2012) are to support and promote people's involvement in the planning, running and monitoring of services; to gather views and experience and to make reports and recommendations for improvement based on those views; to offer information and advice on access to services and choices people can make in services; and to enable local people to monitor the quality of local services.

Our remit extends across all publicly funded health and social care in the borough. It includes statutory powers to enter and view any publicly funded health and social care service and to call for a formal response from the relevant bodies to any of the recommendations we make. Healthwatch Camden has a seat on the Health and Wellbeing Board and contributes to strategic thinking about reducing health inequalities across the borough.

About the Camden Federation of Private Tenants

CFPT was set up in 1980 and is an independent organisation run by and for private tenants. We are a voice organisation for Camden's private tenants and we work for a better and fairer relationship between tenants, landlords and agents, stronger legal rights/protection and accessible local advice and enforcement services. In 2016, we set up the first ever borough wide group for housing association (HA) tenants. This was in response to a recommendation made by Camden Council's Housing Scrutiny Committee and growing concerns that many people felt their landlords were unaccountable and weren't listening and responding to their needs.

Annex 1: Response to recommendations

Healthwatch Camden has statutory powers to make recommendations to those bodies that are responsible for policy or for commissioning or providing health and social care services across Camden. In accordance with regulations, those bodies are required to respond formally and in public to any recommendations made by Healthwatch Camden. The majority of the recommendations in this report are addressed to the London Borough of Camden and to the Camden Clinical Commissioning Group (the body with responsibility for commissioning health services for Camden's residents and for managing the performance of Camden's GPs). Elements of some of our recommendations are also directed at those voluntary sector bodies who provide a range of community based services for Camden's residents so we are also asking for a response from Voluntary Action Camden on behalf of this sector.

We shared our report and recommendations in final draft with these bodies and asked them to respond.

1. Response from London Borough of Camden

London Borough of Camden response to Camden Healthwatch report 'Health and Housing in Camden: experiences of local people' published in March 2019

1. Summary

The Council welcome the report from Healthwatch which is based on research conducted to explore to what extent the various health and wellbeing support services available in Camden can help reduce the impact of poor or insecure housing on the health and wellbeing of local residents.

The report provides useful insight into the resident experience of such services which is valuable in helping the council to explore ways in which services can be changed and improved further.

Healthwatch have invited the Council to respond to four out of five of the key recommendations set out in the report. This is also welcomed and the Council has given each of the recommendations and the relevant findings within the research our attention. In addition to responding to the specific recommendations within the report we have provided additional information about the Council's progress in taking some of these issues forward.

The intention is to push further in order to make a bigger difference over time. Our proposal is that further discussions take place between Healthwatch, ourselves and our strategic partners to explore how we take these issues and the aspirations set out in the report forward as a strategic agenda. A future HWBB meeting would be a good opportunity to do this.

The recommendations of the report are complementary to the Council’s strategic vision for the borough (Camden 2025) and the work that is underway to deliver these over the coming years (Our Camden Plan). We are committed to ensuring all citizens have the opportunity to live healthy, independent lives within the borough. We are resolute in our support for this by creating the conditions that support good health, from good quality housing and walkable neighbourhoods, to helping people take charge of their own wellbeing and we recognise that this is something that no one organisation can do on its own. We also acknowledge that some of this work is still in its infancy with further work to do. We would welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with Healthwatch to test the impact of our efforts and improvements further over time.

2. Camden’s response to the specific recommendations

The attached table provides a detailed response and position statement for each of the four recommendations flagged for the Council to provide a response.

HEALTHWATCH RECOMMENDATIONS	LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN RESPONSE
<p>RECOMMENDATION 1:</p> <p>Camden must strengthen the integration of health and housing at the strategic level.</p> <p>a) Camden’s Cabinet Member for Better Homes should become a permanent member of the Health and Wellbeing Board.</p> <p>b) Those with responsibility for housing should be encouraged and supported to think “health” and vice versa.</p>	<p>The Council is in full agreement with the proposal to take steps to strengthen the further integration of health and housing issues at a strategic level. The Council has been exploring both the linkages and the opportunities to provide more integrated and seamless support to meet resident’s needs for some time, with a partnership sponsored Health and Housing conference having taken place a few years ago.</p> <p>Health and Housing feature prominently within Camden2025 and Our Camden Plan as priorities for our residents and for us to address further if we are to achieve our vision for Camden as a place for everyone, where everyone gets a chance and no one is left behind. We are acutely aware of the impact of housing on the health and wellbeing of our residents.</p> <p>In terms of the specific recommendations made our response is detailed below.</p> <p>a) Camden’s Cabinet Member for Better Homes should become a permanent member of the Health and Wellbeing Board. We are currently reviewing the role and membership of the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB), in the context of significant changes in the wider health and care system. As part of the review process, we will consider how the Cabinet Member for Better Homes could become more involved in the Health and Wellbeing Board going forwards and explore the best way for the Board to influence housing decisions.</p> <p>We are committed to using our landlord role (for council tenants) to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents. Changes to our landlord services having been developed with changes due to be implemented throughout the coming year. We will monitor and review the impact this has on the health and well-being of our tenants.</p> <p>b) Those with responsibility for housing should be encouraged and supported to think “health” and vice versa.</p>

HEALTHWATCH RECOMMENDATIONS	LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN RESPONSE
	<p>As part of our landlord services review we have recently (January 2019) begun a pilot to enable our housing teams to think “health” more. The Camden Psychologically Informed Housing Support Pilot, funded by Public Health, is a two year project providing housing staff with the knowledge, skills, confidence and support to meet the needs of residents better where there are mental health issues or where psychologically informed thinking may be helpful. This includes a wide range of mental health issues including people who experience symptoms of anxiety, depression, psychosis, people affected by dementia, and behavioural issues often in a context of multiple co-morbidities and complex social as well as health needs.</p> <p>The pilot supports Camden housing staff to meet the needs of residents better around issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety and isolation • Tenancy sustainment • Anti-social behaviour and community cohesion • Other issues which arise where psychologically informed approaches are relevant to their resolution. <p>We will use the learning from this pilot to inform our wider Landlord Redesign programme and our future model for supporting residents going forward.</p> <p>In terms of health services we will take this forward for further discussion to see what support we could put in place to enable health services to think ‘housing’ more when dealing with residents.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATION 2:</p> <p>Camden must strengthen the integration of health and housing at the level of frontline services.</p>	<p>Integration of services at the frontline is a significant challenge to achieve and integration itself can take place to varying degrees. The Council is committed to ensuring our frontline staff are equipped with access to information sources that enable them to provide advice and signposting to relevant services in response to the issues and needs that are identified. As</p>

HEALTHWATCH RECOMMENDATIONS	LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN RESPONSE
<p>a) Housing officers must be equipped to encourage resilience and wellbeing through “social prescribing” as well as meeting direct housing needs.</p> <p>b) “Contact Camden” must offer residents clear pathways to appropriate services and call takers need the skill and flexibility to also connect residents to appropriate community based services.</p> <p>c) Work to advance Camden’s new neighbourhood approach for encouraging community resilience and wellbeing should include housing issues on the agenda.</p>	<p>mentioned above our landlord services review is exploring different ways to achieve this and introducing pilot projects to test different approaches.</p> <p>In terms of the specific recommendations made our response is detailed below. We recognise that although we have a number of initiatives in place what is important is that we test the delivery and impact of these approaches over time to see whether we are achieving our ambitions to support our residents better.</p> <p>a) Housing officers must be equipped to encourage resilience and wellbeing through “social prescribing” as well as meeting direct housing needs.</p> <p>All front-line staff, including Housing Officers, across the Council and in our partner organisations, are given the opportunity to undertake Camden’s Making Every Contact Count (MECC) training programme. This training ensures that staff have the knowledge and skills to discuss a range of health and social determinants of health issues with residents and to sign-post them to appropriate support available locally. A MECC training programme specifically for housing staff has also been developed.</p> <p>WISH Plus is part of Camden’s social prescribing model that launched in October 2018 with Age UK Camden’s Care Navigators Service and Voluntary Action Camden’s community links service. People can access around 30 different services through one WISH Plus conversation. The service is overseen by Camden’s housing service.</p> <p>During 2017/18 WISH received 2,335 referrals and made 4,514 links to partner service providers. On average 200 referrals are received per month. Although WISH Plus is tenure neutral, council tenants make up 69% of referrals.</p>

HEALTHWATCH RECOMMENDATIONS	LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN RESPONSE
	<p>We recognise that we need to market this service better to PRS tenants and we are looking at how the services can be better resourced. The team work closely with Public Health who are highly supportive of WISH.</p> <p>b) “Contact Camden” must offer residents clear pathways to appropriate services and call takers need the skill and flexibility to also connect residents to appropriate community based services.</p> <p>All front-line staff, including Housing Officers and Contact Camden, across the Council and in our partner organisations, are given the opportunity to undertake Camden’s Making Every Contact Count (MECC) training programme. This training ensures that staff have the knowledge and skills to discuss a range of health and social determinants of health issues with residents and to sign-post them to appropriate support available locally. The training covers a range of issues including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy living (stop smoking, physical activity, sensible drinking, mental health, healthy eating and sexual health) • Money worries, debt and fuel poverty • Getting the right job • Housing <p>We are currently undertaking a review of Contact Camden as a whole service and will build this feedback into this process.</p> <p>c) Work to advance Camden’s new neighbourhood approach for encouraging community resilience and wellbeing should include housing issues on the agenda.</p> <p>The Council and local NHS partners are working closely to develop “neighbourhoods” as the local, sub-borough geography for place-based integration of health, care, wider public sector and VCS services, and for working with communities to build resilience, harness community strengths and assets and improve health and wellbeing outcomes. Building on our five GP neighbourhoods, joining up services and working with communities at neighbourhood level provides the opportunity to</p>

HEALTHWATCH RECOMMENDATIONS	LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN RESPONSE
	<p>understand and respond more holistically to the needs of residents and communities, underpinned by a social view of physical and mental health and its determinants.</p> <p>As a crucial social determinant of health and wellbeing, we recognise the central importance of housing to this agenda, and the need to develop integrated, place based approaches that includes not just health and care services and support, but also services and support that respond to these wider social factors. At a grassroots level we are doing a lot of work to better link adult social care and housing. We have an internal Housing and Accommodation Group which oversees this at a strategic level. We are exploring options about how best to include housing in our integrated neighbourhood working development with Camden's CCG.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATION 3:</p> <p>Camden residents must be able to easily find out about and access the statutory, voluntary and community sector services they need to keep themselves well. Services must be easier to find and to use.</p> <p>a) All services must use names that make online searches easy and convey the service being offered.</p> <p>b) Camden should develop more coherent points of access to its large and diverse advice and support offer.</p> <p>c) Information about services must be communicated in a variety of ways, including through online social networks and personal contact and including proactive work to target vulnerable groups.</p>	<p>The Council holds the same ambition in terms of the accessibility of information, support and services to residents when they need them. In terms of the specific recommendations made our response is detailed below.</p> <p>a) All services must use names that make online searches easy and convey the service being offered</p> <p>Our Community Partners are working in partnership with Voluntary Action Camden to look at how we can maximise the use of its database which provides information on voluntary and community groups in Camden and ensure that information is consistent across all areas. We can recommend clarifications and suggestions to organisations, however we have no control over groups that we don't fund so cannot be prescriptive about what their offer should be and how they should describe it.</p> <p>b) Camden should develop more coherent points of access to its large and diverse advice and support offer</p> <p>We agree with this recommendation and are developing work on this. We have invested in a new platform (Liferay DXP) to allow more flexibility in the digital products we are able to create. A feature of this</p>

HEALTHWATCH RECOMMENDATIONS	LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN RESPONSE
<p>d) Camden Council's website must be easy to navigate and include easy to find information about private rental sector housing and health related options. Cyclical and dead end or inaccurate links must be eliminated.</p>	<p>will be personalisation. We will be able to define and create user segments to be used in the website to enable a better understanding of citizen profiles as well as more targeted communications. This new platform also brings us closer to having a Single View of Customer where all customer data can be collated and be visible to officers and customers (subject to data and privacy laws)</p> <p>This will mean based on what we know about you we are able to tailor the home page (and the website in general) to a particular customer's needs. This could include (for example) putting the welfare advice team's service offer more prominently on pages for people we know are Council tenants and in some form of arrears, thereby creating more points of access to the support and advice we offer.</p> <p>c) Information about services must be communicated in a variety of ways, including through online social networks and personal contact and including proactive work to target vulnerable groups We are continuing to promote a range of options like the summer programme in print and home delivered. The new format quarterly magazine will look to signpost community offer as well. The housing content will now also go to all residents rather than just housing tenants. This will include positive elements such as events as well as how to access services and advice.</p> <p>d) Camden Council's website must be easy to navigate and include easy to find information about private rental sector housing and health related options. Cyclical and dead end or inaccurate links must be eliminated We want our website to be as easy as possible to navigate across all areas. Since the relaunch of the website in December we have reduced our web pages from 7200 to 1200. These 1200 actually accounted for 80% of visited pages. This rationalisation means it is much easier to find content then previously.</p>

HEALTHWATCH RECOMMENDATIONS	LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN RESPONSE
	<p>We also have a much better search function using a 'key word' search function in the background which can be added to as and when needed. For example parents search for both 'term dates' and 'school holidays'. Either search will bring you the correct page.</p> <p>On our new website we have created exclusive webpages for private tenants which can easily be accessed by either using our search engine (explained above) or by navigating from the homepage in just two clicks. The section, titled – “<i>Advice for private tenants</i>” not only issues advice and support but also provides information on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirements for agents and landlords and private tenants' rights • The housing health and safety rating system • The private sector housing enforcement policy detailing information on how we aim to improve living conditions, and bring properties up to standard. • The capability to report a hazard within the home <p>As part of our improvements across wider navigation of the website the number of users taking 10 clicks or more to reach their destination has dropped by more than 50%, and the majority of users on the new site reach their intended page within two to four clicks. Our analytics tool (Site improve) allows us to run reports detailing broken links, spelling mistakes and also any readability issues.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATION 4:</p> <p>Camden residents who rent their homes from the private sector must have easy access to London Borough of Camden and to voluntary and community sector advice and support services.</p>	<p>The Council has maintained a long-term commitment to work with other housing providers across the borough to meet the needs of Camden residents, as far as is feasible to do. We have strong strategic relationships with RSLs in Camden and we encourage private sector landlords to participate in our licensing scheme to provide suitable a standard of rented accommodation.</p>

HEALTHWATCH RECOMMENDATIONS	LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN RESPONSE
<p>a) Camden’s statutory, voluntary and community sector services must make a more explicit offer to private rental tenants.</p> <p>b) Camden’s policy work on housing issues should place greater emphasis on including the private rental sector.</p>	<p>We currently provide private rented tenants with access to advice and support services in a number of ways and have more planned as highlighted below.</p> <p>a) Camden’s statutory, voluntary and community sector services must make a more explicit offer to private rental tenants The Council provides advice and support for private tenants in a number of different ways including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who are threatened will illegal eviction or who are harassed by their landlord. • Taking enforcement action against letting agents who are not part of a redress scheme and who don’t display their fees. • Funding to the Camden Federation of Private Tenants to provide advocacy, information and support to private tenants. <p>The wider advice provision with Camden is currently under review. The aim of the review is to establish a wider advice system under which all services operate. This review also includes the recommissioning of the Camden Advice Partnership under a new framework which aims to allow greater creativity, innovation and responsiveness to local needs. A significant part of the review will also include the use of online resources to ensure easier and timely access to accurate information. This will be from both Camden council and from our VCS colleagues. Private rent tenants will be involved in this process to ensure the right information is available online and in person.</p> <p>b) Camden’s policy work on housing issues should place greater emphasis on including the private rental sector Our Camden Plan states, ‘We will strive to make homes in Camden safe, well-managed and well-maintained, and make sure that people’s homes meet their needs. We will play an active role in shaping a private rented sector that works.’ This ethos is echoed within our Private Rented Strategy which was published in 2013. This strategy has three themes:</p>

HEALTHWATCH RECOMMENDATIONS	LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN RESPONSE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong tenant voice• Improved quality of homes• Increased supply of affordable homes <p>Although the strategy themes remain relevant we recognise there is further work to be done and will be refreshing this strategy in partnership with the voluntary and community sectors.</p>

2. Response from Camden Clinical Commissioning Group

Thank you for sharing the Healthwatch Health and Housing Report, in which you aimed to find out the extent to which the various health and wellbeing support services available in Camden, can help reduce the impact of poor or insecure housing on the health and wellbeing of local residents.

In December 2017, Camden Council and Camden Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) reviewed a number of social prescribing services. The reviews found a lot of good practice, with evidence of positive outcomes delivered for residents. In particular the care navigation service delivered holistic, person centred care to residents.

However, a few areas for improvement were identified including ensuring that there was consistent coverage of services across the borough and increasing partnership working between the various social prescribing services.

As a result of the review, Camden CCG commissioned a new model of social prescribing that includes the following:

- A single point of access
- Care Navigators providing services for adults (18+) with more complex needs, including case management for up to six weeks.
- Community Link Volunteers recruited in each neighbourhood, based in a variety of community resources, including GP practices, to allow for the maximum accessibility both for health professionals and for self-referrals and to support the delivery of social prescribing.
- A volunteer coordinator responsible for providing volunteers for the five neighbourhood areas in Camden.

The new service began as of 1 October 2018 and in response to Recommendation 5 of your report '*Camden's GP practices should play a more active role in connecting patients to support through Camden's statutory, voluntary and community sector services*' we have outlined below how we are planning to or have met these recommendations.

- c) Camden's GP practices should consistently offer "social prescribing" including signposting residents to housing support services where appropriate.

Camden CCG currently commissions social prescribing services for adults and a specific service for people who are living with mental health issues both, of which are embedded in GP practices. GPs are able to refer residents to social prescribers for a range of non-medical issues, including housing. Camden's social prescribing providers (Age UK Camden, Voluntary Action Camden (VAC) and Mind in Camden) have worked hard to ensure that there are close links with local housing teams so that residents can be provided with accurate housing advice and support at the earliest opportunity. We will continue to strengthen this link in response to the Healthwatch feedback and ensure that this is routinely offered as part of the expanding social prescribing service in Camden.

d) Camden's "social prescribing" offer must be clear, coherent and well integrated with easy pathways to facilitate GP referrals.

Camden's social prescribing offer has been established as a single model, which allows residents to receive the right support at the right time, depending on their needs and preferences.

The providers have a communications plan, which looks to continually review communications to GPs, provide regular updates at primary care locality meetings and review the Camden CCG GP website social prescribing page to increase coverage across the borough and ensure that GPs find it easy to refer to the service(s) as well as have confidence that residents will be supported in a way that helps them get the information, advice and support they need.

There has been good progress towards ensuring that there is a clear referral process and that all GP practices offer social prescribing. Over the coming 6 months, the CCG will be working with the provider to further improve the number of practices actively using the social prescribing services. Currently, volunteers have been placed or are in the process of being placed in 14 practices in Camden. The provider will be working towards the target of having a volunteer in every practice in Camden. The CCG and the provider will also be looking to further improve referral pathways for GPs. This will include establishing a stronger link to the mental health social prescribing pathway and updating information on the Camden GP Website. The provider will also be attending locality meetings in the next month to raise awareness about the services and how to access them.

In line with commitments made in the NHS long-term plan, social prescribing link workers will be embedded within primary care networks in the future. The first tranche of staff in these roles will be in place from 2020/21 with a further expansion by 2023/24. The CCG will ensure that the development of these roles

links effectively with the existing social prescribing services to maximise the benefits for patients.

Dr Neel Gupta

Chair

Camden Clinical Commissioning Group
Group

Sarah Mansuralli

Chief Operating Officer

Camden Clinical Commissioning

3. Response from Voluntary Action Camden (on behalf of Camden's voluntary and community sector)

VAC Response to Healthwatch Camden's Health and Housing Report 2019

Recommendation 3 Response

We acknowledge that VAC also often lacks clarity in naming and commits to renaming all projects and job descriptions into plain English. Furthermore, we will promote the use of plain English to our members and discourage jargon, acronyms and opaque naming of services.

As part of our efforts to make services more accessible to residents VAC has a web page listing local information portals (some of which are themselves portals to portals) [LINK](#) to help people navigate the array of services (and portals into those services) on offer. In addition, we have a gateway website (www.OneCamden.com) which is a simplified route into the voluntary and community sector in Camden, using plain English and never more than one click deep.

Recommendation 4 Response

VAC will work with the Camden Federation of Private Tenants to:

1. Hold a focus group with private renters to find out their views, concerns and get their ideas on ways to make services more accessible and feed that into a briefing
2. Produce a briefing to raise awareness of private renters' issues and help VCS providers of services to make sure that their service is inclusive and does not give private renters the impression that the service is not for them. The

briefing will be available on our website and will be emailed to all VCS contacts in Camden and will be promoted with a media campaign.

Recommendation 5 Response

Social Prescribing

VAC is working pro-actively to promote and develop social prescribing in Camden. We are working strategically with the CCG, GLA, Haverstock (a Federation of 14 Camden GP practices) and others to develop a framework for social prescribing that works in the Camden context. And we are working practically on the ground with a range of partners to deliver social prescribing alongside care navigation.

Currently the Camden Social Prescribing Service includes Community Links Health Advocates (run by VAC), Wish Plus (run by Camden Council) and Community Connectors (run by Age UK Camden) and aims to help connect residents to community-based activities and services that will contribute to health and wellbeing. Our Community Connectors service places volunteers into GPs surgeries. The volunteers are all RSPH (Royal Society of Public Health) trained and have detailed knowledge of local voluntary and community organisations, and match people to suitable activities, if necessary making introductions and following up, to provide a personalised, friendly person-centred service.

VAC's knowledge of the voluntary and community sector in Camden is a vital part of our ability to make this service work. As part of the next phase we have started a Social Prescribing Learning Network (SPLN) aimed at voluntary and community groups involved in social prescribing. This network complements the practitioners' network (Big Team) and the strategic forums at the CCG, GLA and GP Federation (Haverstock).

Kevin Nunan

Interim Executive Director

7th May 2019

Annex 2: Interview questions

Interviews were structured using the following questions:

1. What are your housing arrangements?
 - a) Council tenant
 - b) Housing association tenant
 - c) Private tenant
 - d) Home owner (please specify either leasehold under council freehold or leasehold under private freeholder or freehold)

2. Tell us a bit about your home. Does your home support your physical and mental health? If not, why not

3. Do you know about any services that could help you?

Prompts:

Have you heard of - for example -

- a) Camden Federation Private Tenants (CFPT)
 - b) WISH Plus
 - c) Private rental team in Camden
 - d) GPs
 - e) Citizen's Advice Bureau
 - f) Shelter housing support sessions
 - g) Law Centre
 - h) Others....
-
4. How do you find out about things? (Do you have internet access?)

 5. Are you accessing any services that can help your wellbeing? If not, why not?

 6. What services do you think might be a help to you?

 7. What might help you to make use of more of the services that are already available in Camden?

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