

Tough Times Ahead

- Rents increasing
- More tenants than properties available
- Housing Benefit cuts
- Increased fear of eviction

This is not a good time to be a private tenant living in Camden. The average rent for a one bedroom flat is now £1,377 per month and agents and landlords know they don't have to work very hard for our business – in what is a high demand borough.

So it's more important than ever that Camden Council supports private tenants and understands the variety of problems we are facing – as we now make up the largest group of tenants living in the borough.

It's important too, that tenants are continually made aware of the services provided by the Council and others, which can help resolve difficulties.

That includes the private sector housing advice service (see page 7), the private sector environmental health team that deals with problem properties and problematic landlords (see page 4) and Shelter's new housing advice service in their new high street charity shop (see page 6).

It's also vitally important that Camden continues to have an independent organisation working on behalf of private tenants – which for the last 31 years has been the Camden Federation of Private Tenants (CFPT).

However, the last 9 months has been a period of great uncertainty for the organisation. Thankfully the Council stepped in with some emergency funding to cover us for January to March – and we now hope to extend this to the rest of 2012 and the years beyond.

We are also looking for more private tenants to become supporters of the organisation. As a supporter you will get updates about what is happening with the organisation and information that is of interest to private tenants.

To sign up for FREE email admin@cfpt.org.uk with your name and address – remembering to put **SUPPORTER** in the subject field.

You can also follow us on Twitter @SaveCFPT



To hear what Councillor Julian Fulbrook has to say about us go to:
www.ccradio.org
 and listen to
 Camden Newscast 12

Renting in London

Lucia Psenakova who had a bad experience renting a studio flat in Camden, investigates how other private tenants from abroad get on with renting in London.

With growing numbers of potential first-time buyers priced out of the market and rising demand for accommodation—many tenants in London have lost hope of stable rents or good living standards.

Increasing amounts of foreign nationals are also complaining that whereas the rest of Europe keeps up with reasonable standards of rented properties, even in troubled times, London seems to have gone up in price but not in quality.

After moving to London, Julie Thorp, a 21-year-old student from Norway, and her friend were on a quest to find a flat in Camden within their student weekly budget of £240: “I was expecting to find a pretty good flat as I would have done in Norway. The biggest difference is the standard in general. You can pay the same amount for a flat in Oslo, for instance, but the standard would be so much higher.”

Differences in living standards were also eye-opening for Sanja Ljubic, who

originally comes from Serbia, but has also lived in rented properties in the Czech Republic. The 63-year-old teacher commented: “The quality of rented flats and houses is poor compared to the quality of buildings on the continent.” When talking about living standards in Serbia she smiles and says: “Properties in my country are very nice, but what they are ready to rent here for a huge amount of money, I sometimes can’t believe.” Sanja was shocked by the state of London’s flats. She sums it up: “Dirty, untidy, such a mess and I was thinking who is going to rent this property if it looks like that.”

Maria Norman also found it hard to get used to the lack of cleanliness after she swapped her beloved Poland for London to study English. Maria, 52, who works in a children nursery and lives in Hampstead has previously rented in Kensal Rise, Acton and Shepherd’s Bush. She describes her first attempt at renting in London: “I rented a room, because I was on my own. It was OK for the money, but it wasn’t as hygienic as I was hoping to find.” When the time came for Maria and her partner to find a suitable rented dwelling together, she clearly remembers the struggle. “The

state of flats – some of them were really horrible – smelly, damp, dirty.”

An unpleasant surprise also awaited a 29-year-old entrepreneur Gabriel Kobak from Slovakia when he first arrived in London. He recalls: “I was very surprised by the size of properties here. They are very small in comparison to Slovakian standards.” Although his renting experience is positive, he laughs at how Londoners define “spacious”: “They call it a room, but we wouldn’t even call it a shoe cupboard.”

Lithuanian Natalia Rymkevici, 34, didn’t have her hopes set too high when she first moved to London. “I couldn’t expect much as I came on my own with no support or fortune. I had to share a very busy apartment which wasn’t exactly my dream.” The spirited classroom assistant, who now rents a studio in West Hampstead, has had her fair share of moving around, but her experience is mostly positive. To stay afloat in London’s sink-or-swim renting world, Natalia’s personal advice to tenants is: “Pay your rent on time, look after the place and get good references.”

Do You Have A problem With Draughty Windows?



Adding a thermal lining to your curtains is an easy way to save money on your bills and keep your home warm!

If you would like to learn how to make thermal linings for your curtains without using a sewing machine and take a pair home, come along to our workshop.

Materials are provided for **FREE** to those on benefits or £5 for all others.

When: **Thursday 26th April**

Where: **Camden Federation of Private Tenants, 11-17 The Marr, Camden Street, NW1 0HE**

Time: **12.30 – 3.00pm**

To book a place, please call the Green Camden helpline on **0800 801 738** or email: **greencamden@camden.gov.uk**

SAFE AGENT

SAFE Agents protect your money

SAFE – Safe Agent Fully Endorsed – is a mark denoting firms that protect landlords and tenants money through client money protection schemes. For more details of the protection SAFEagents can offer you visit:

www.safeagents.co.uk
or call **0845 519 7992**

www.safeagents.co.uk

News in Brief

Bake A Cake For Your Landlord

On average, five tenants compete for each available property to rent.

London lettings agents ludlowthompson.com have reported that people desperate to rent are sending in CVs in an attempt to impress prospective landlords and one person even baked a cake. It worked.



London Rents Increase

Average London rents have risen by 6.9% to break through the £1,000 per month barrier for the first time. The average monthly rent for a one bedroom flat in Camden is £1,377.

However, some think this may be good news for tenants. David Newnes, director of LSL property Services said "... more accommodation will come on the market and prices will stabilise."

Universal Credit Crisis Claim

London Councils, the body which represents the capital's 33 local authorities, has produced a report which says that 130,000 households will not be able to pay their rent when the government introduces the new Universal Credit benefit between 2013 and 2016.

Universal Credit is designed to replace the range of benefits currently available (including Housing Benefit) with one single benefit that will be capped at £350 per week for single households and £500 per week for others.

London Councils have asked the government to introduce a London-weighted cap which would reflect the

higher rents paid in London – and that Child Benefit be removed altogether.

The Department for Work and Pensions has disputed the figures and said that only 50,000 households across the country will have their benefits reduced.

Shanty-Style Living In London

This is not a description of the Occupy London camp set up by protesters outside St Paul's Cathedral, but the conditions faced by tenants living in Newham, east London.



Welcome to your new home in the private rented sector

Council officers who carried out the raid on one "super shed" found that people were paying £300 a month to live in an illegal structure with no heating or toilet and mattresses on the floor.

Newham Council is also consulting on whether to licence all of its private landlords. Kay Boycott from the housing charity Shelter said "We urge other local councils to follow Newham's lead in sending a clear signal that enforcing the law against rogue landlords is a priority".

Winter Death Disgrace

The Office of National Statistics recently announced that there were an estimated 25,700 excess winter deaths in England and Wales in 2010/11, virtually unchanged from the previous year.

The majority of deaths occurred among

those aged 75 and over. Michelle Mitchell, Charity Director of Age UK, branded the situation a "disgrace". She went on to add "We like to think of ourselves as a civilised society which



protects the most vulnerable but the numbers of older people who do not survive the winter here is far higher than most European countries where the weather is far colder".

Housing Benefit Cuts

Will You Have To Move Home In 2012 ?

Go to our website at: www.cfpt.org.uk to download our latest information leaflet.



Facebook

Check out our new and improved Camden Federation of Private Tenants Facebook page. We want to make it as interactive as possible, so please Like or comment on it.



Keep Warm and Save Money

Staying warm in your home can be difficult if you are on a low income or benefits. However there is help available for tenants in privately rented accommodation.

Energy saving grants

Insulating your home is an easy way of saving money on your bills, keeping your home warm and cutting carbon emissions. Insulating your loft could save you up to £175 a year. Camden offer many grants through the **Warmer, Cheaper, Greener** programme to help towards improving the energy efficiency of your home.

Measures include:

- Loft insulation
- Draught-proofing
- Cavity wall insulation
- Central heating
- New boiler
- Heating controls

For more information, call the Green Camden helpline (see right)

Green Camden helpline

The Green Camden helpline offers free impartial advice from a team of trained advisors covering:

- Energy efficiency advice
- Grant referrals for insulation and heating
- Choosing the right energy tariff
- Increasing your income

Call free on **0800 801 738**

or visit **www.**

camden.gov.uk/greencamden



Free Well and Warm Visits

Camden Council is offering free Well and Warm home visits to private tenants on certain benefits or who have a long-term illness across Camden.

Their trained advisors will visit at a time convenient to you and provide practical energy saving advice and install a range of small energy and water saving measures.

They can also offer advice on grants and other help that may be available to you, all totally FREE of charge.

To arrange a visit or check your eligibility, call the Green Camden helpline for FREE on **0800 801 738**

Protecting Your Deposit – How To Get It Right

When a tenancy comes to an end, there is usually no disagreement about the return of the deposit. But sometimes there is, and this can cause much hardship and inconvenience to both landlord and tenant. TDS is on hand to ensure that disputes about their return are resolved swiftly, inexpensively and impartially.

Many tenants in the private sector give their landlords a deposit against possible non-payment of rent or damage to property. The Housing Act 2004 made provision for both the protection of tenancy deposits and the resolution of disputes over their return. The Dispute Service runs one such scheme on behalf of the Government: The Tenancy Deposit Scheme (TDS) and since April 2007 all deposits taken for Assured Shorthold Tenancies **must** be protected.

The TDS has so far protected over £2bn in tenant deposits and have dealt with over 32,000 tenancy deposit disputes.

To see their guide to the **Top 10 things** you need to do to get it right go to: **www.tds.gb.com**



CFPT Members' Landmark Legal Victory

Residents of Froggnal Estate on Finchley Road have achieved a landmark legal victory on the issue of repairs to their buildings.

Marie Garside, Chair of the Froggnal Estate Residents Association, which is a member of CFPT, says that many of the problems on the estate are those familiar to other leaseholders - bad management, neglect, overcharging and intimidation - but some are probably unique.

Landlord Norman Freed has been disqualified as a company director but still tried to control the estate. Acting as manager he took over the residents' parking spaces and tried to turn them into a public pay and display car park. He has also made repeated planning applications to add extra storeys to the buildings.

In 2009, the residents association applied to the Land Valuation Tribunal to have a manager appointed. This proved to be a mistake. Bruce Maunder Taylor, who was appointed, decided that residents should hand over more than half a million pounds for repairs. Anyone failing to produce their share received a county court summons. Marie Garside says she almost lost count of the number of cases that he brought. But



where the residents association helped with the defence, he lost.

Initially residents turned to the government-funded Leasehold Advisory Service to mediate, but Maunder Taylor instead gained a ruling from the Land Valuation Tribunal that the charges were reasonable, asserting that if people could not pay they must sell their flats.

Many residents, including some who could afford to pay, were horrified and, on legal advice, Marie Garside and residents association Deputy Chair Dr Mike Anson took the matter to appeal in the Upper Chamber of the Lands Tribunal.

At the appeal hearing in September, Counsel Edward Denehan argued

that works on the estate and charges for them may have been reasonable within the meaning of the law. But he maintained that carrying out all the works in one contract in such a short period was unnecessary and, thus, unreasonable.

Judge Alice Robinson came down clearly on the residents' side agreeing with Denehan's point and reinforcing it with the observation that Maunder Taylor had, in fact, already accepted the association's position when he phased some of the charges to be levied in 2010 rather than 2009. Thus, the principle for which the association was arguing had already been established.

The appeal decision creates a precedent in case law which may prove vital for leaseholders all over England and Wales.

Postscript

In face of Maunder Taylor ignoring an invitation to resign, a group of residents took the issue of having the estate manager replaced back to the Land Valuation Tribunal. A new one, Roger Southam, has now been appointed, and his company Chainbow comes highly recommended by other leaseholder associations.

Need Help with your Housing ?

Camden Council's Private Sector Housing Team (PSHT) is specifically tasked with improving properties in the private rented sector. By law, private landlords must provide accommodation which is safe and free from significant hazards. Sadly this is not the case in many rented homes in Camden.

When we receive a complaint about accommodation in poor condition we investigate and, if necessary, ask the landlord to undertake repairs and improvements. Should they not undertake works voluntarily, we can use powers under the Housing Act 2004 along with other public health powers to ensure works are done. This may mean the service of legal notices or even prosecution.

Recently, we received a referral based largely on the dilapidated appearance of a property. Our officers found more than 30 foreign students living in a



house with no evidence of anything more than patch-up repairs having been done since the 1970's and no adequate fire precautions in place. 9 of 12 boilers were found to be leaking gas and had to be condemned. It is likely that only the draughty and ill-fitting windows prevented a fatal case of carbon monoxide poisoning.

All we received was the address of the property, but this allowed us to take action which probably saved lives. The landlord was prosecuted and the property will soon provide greatly improved conditions for tenants.

Our work mainly comes through complaints or referrals from a small number of tenants and organisations like Camden Federation of Private Tenants. The most vulnerable tenants also tend to be the ones least likely to complain, so if you – or someone you know – are living in poor-quality housing, we would really like to hear about it.

Please contact: **020 7974 4444 ext 4** or email us at: **ppp@camden.gov.uk** and provide details.

Sam Waskett
Environmental Health Surveyor

National Voice for Private Tenants

A national organisation has recently been formed to provide a much needed voice for tenants in the private rented sector. The National Private Tenants Organisation (NPTO) was set up by the four private tenants organisations in England based in Blackpool, Brent, Camden (who produce this newsletter) and Scarborough.

Secretary Jacky Peacock said: "The aim of the new organisation is to work for professionally managed, secure, decent and affordable private rented homes in sustainable communities."

Chairperson Kevin Allen added: "This is a critical time for private tenants to have a national voice. With home ownership out of reach for many people and the lack of social housing, private renting is becoming the only option for many. We have real concerns about rogue landlords and sub-standard homes.

He went on to say: "Changes to housing benefit, legal aid and changes to social housing tenancies are set to make this situation much worse."

Membership of the national group is open to private tenant groups and individual tenants who do not have a local group to join.

Email: enquiries@npto.org.uk

 Follow them on Twitter
@NPTOrg



Get help with your housing and grab a bargain at Shelter's new charity shop in Camden Town

A fully trained housing advisor can give you advice on issues such as:

- ▶ Rent arrears
- ▶ Disrepair
- ▶ Housing Benefit
- ▶ Possession action
- ▶ Illegal eviction
- ▶ Landlord harassment

Drop-in sessions every Tuesday between 10am – 1pm

Phone **0344 515 1280** to arrange an appointment on other days

71 Camden High Street, NW1 7JL



Landlord Watch

Olympic Games – Less Fun for the Rest of Us

What hubris led the to the Olympics being staged in London this year? The country may be (further) bankrupted. Broadcast schedules hijacked. The transport system overwhelmed as hundred of thousands of participants, officials and spectators descend on the capital.

What spoilsports we are. But our problems are tiny and passing compared to a more sinister trend.

There's the promise that the Olympic Village will later provide affordable housing, though these days that's almost a contradiction in terms. Those householders who rent out their homes to visitors (and wisely leave our shores for the duration) may see windfall profits.

We were not warned that private landlords also anticipating profits like

gangbusters, would start evicting or not renewing leases for their tenants to make way for visitors. Equally, the gentrification of the East End will see landlords demanding higher rents in post-industrial areas which were once cheap places to live and work for artists and other creative types.

According to the Evening Standard, residents say landlords are actually issuing statutory two month notices to terminate tenancies mid-term to remove existing tenants. Bizarrely, Shelter reports that some are issuing leases with a clause which obliges the tenant to vacate for the duration of the Games – one landlord has specified that you vacate for the Games or face a permanent increase in rent by £500 per month!

The profiteering even reaches as far as

Camden. According to the Hampstead & Highgate Express a flat at Camden Lock has been advertised at around £2000 per night compared with £213 normally. A one bed flat nearby was being offered at £1,750 per night – 12 times the usual cost.

On the brighter side, once the 17,000 athletes and officials housed in the Olympic Village have departed, some 3,000 properties will be available. Apparently, 1,379 of them at "affordable rents". It remains to be seen to whom they are rented – and at what definition of affordable.

This Games serves another purpose too – it shows that the private landlords who piously claim to be helping to solve London's housing crisis are not only exploiting it but, in these instances, helping create it.



Photo: Ben Sutherland



Housing Advice In Camden

Housing Options and Advice Service

Offers specialist advice on housing options, rights to stay in your home, service charges, rent levels, repairs and other tenancy rights and mortgage arrears.

Town Hall Extension
Argyle Street
London WC1H 8NJ

Tel: 020 7974 4444
(Mon-Fri 8am-6pm)

Out of these hours an emergency service is offered.

Outreach service sessions at Kilburn Citizen's Advice Bureau and Kilburn Library, by appointment.

Website: www.camden.gov.uk/housingoptions

Camden Community Law Centre

2 Prince of Wales Road, NW5 3LG

Tel: 020 7284 6510 for housing advice availability

Mary Ward Legal Centre

26-27 Boswell Street, WC1N 3JZ

Tel: 020 7831 7079 for housing advice availability

Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association

39 Tottenham Street, W1T 4RX

Tel: 020 7580 4576

Tuesday (10.00am-1.30pm) open door advice session

The College of Law – Legal Advice Centre

14 Store Street, WC1E 7DE

Tel: 01483 216528 to make an appointment

BPP Law School – Legal Advice Clinic

68-70 Red Lion Street, WC1R 4NY

Tel: 020 7430 5668 to make an appointment

Shelter London Public Advice Line

Tel: 0344 515 1540

For peace of mind with all your housing and family law advice

Hodge Jones & Allen solicitors offer a full personal legal advice service, including: housing damp and disrepair, landlord tenant and property disputes, divorce, family and children law, will writing and dealing with probate, crime and fraud representation, personal and medical injury claims and dispute resolution. We can offer legal aid and conditional fee funding options. Our office is just 150yds from Euston Square tube.



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www.hja.net

020 7874 8300

Hodge Jones & Allen LLP, 180 North Gower Street, London NW1 2NB

Housing Advice for Leaseholders

Leasehold Advisory Service

Provides free legal advice to leaseholders, landlords, professional advisers, managers and others on the law affecting residential leasehold in England and Wales.

Monday-Friday
(9.00am-5.00pm)

Tel: 020 7383 9800

Email: info@lease-advice.org

Website:
www.lease-advice.org.uk

Camden Council's Housing Options and Advice Service can also advise leaseholders.

(See box on the left for their details.)

Are You A Local Business?

Need More Potential Customers In These Difficult Times?

Then Why Not Advertise In This Newsletter?

It's low cost, effective and 3,000 copies go out to variety of individuals and organisations across Camden.



Contact Ruhina Ali for more information about our low advertising rates



Become a member of
**Camden Federation of
Private Tenants**



CFPT Needs You

CFPT is the voice of private tenants in Camden

- We work with and support private tenants in Camden to organise and campaign for better protection, rights and services.
- We work with the Council to improve standards in Camden's growing private rented sector.
- We work closely with national organisations such as Shelter, Age UK, Citizens Advice and Friends of the Earth to campaign for change.
- We also signpost people to advice agencies, and provide information, support and basic advice on a wide variety of tenancy-related issues.

If you are interested in getting involved with us you can:

- Become a member (see the left hand side of this page for details of how to join)
- Become a volunteer (visit our website for more about this)
- Join the Management Committee (call or email us about this)

Translation

CFPT est la voix des locataires dans le secteur privé de la municipalité de Camden. Nous travaillons avec les locataires du secteur privé de la municipalité de Camden et nous les soutenons pour qu'ils s'organisent et mènent une campagne afin d'obtenir une meilleure protection, le respect de leurs droits et une prestation de services.

CFPT es la voz de los inquilinos del distrito de Camden. Trabajamos con los inquilinos del distrito de Camden y les ayudamos a organizarse y a conseguir más protección, derechos y servicios.

CFPT é a expressão dos inquilinos privados em Camden. Nós trabalhamos com os inquilinos privados em Camden e lhes damos apoio para organizar e fazer campanha por melhores direitos, serviços e proteção.

CFPT waa codka gaarka ah ee ijaartayaasha xaafada Camden. Waxaan la shaqaynaa oo ka caawinaa ijaartayaasha Camden in ay is habeeyaan uuna ololeeyaan kobcinta amaanka, xaquuqdooda iyo adeega.

ক্যামডেনে বসবাসরত বেসরকারী ভাড়াটিয়াদের কষ্টস্বর হছে সিএফপিটি । আমরা ক্যামডেনে বসবাসরত বেসরকারী ভাড়াটিয়াদের সঙ্গে একত্রে কাজ করি। এবং তাদের আরো অধিকতর রক্ষনাবেক্ষন, অধিকারসমূহ এবং অন্যান্য সেবার জন্য সংগঠিত হতে এবং প্রচারাভিযান চালাতে সহায়তা করি ।

هي صوت المستأجرين الخاصين في كامدن. المستأجرين الخاصين في كامدن فيديريالية للقيام بتنظيم وإدارة حملة من أجل الحصول على حماية نحن نعمل مع المستأجرين الخاصين في كامدن ونقدمهم وحقوق وخدمات أفضل.

Camden Federation of Private Tenants is registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act as The Camden Federation for Private Tenants Limited
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Camden Federation of Private Tenants

11-17 The Marr, Camden Street, London NW1 0HE

Tel: 020 7383 0151 Email: admin@cfpt.org.uk Web: www.cfpt.org.uk

Editor: Robert Taylor

Design: www.intertype.co.uk

- As a member of CFPT you will receive the quarterly newsletter, be kept informed of current housing issues, changes in legislation and relevant campaigns.
- You will also receive invites to meetings, events and have free access to our office resources.
- By joining, you are helping to make us a bigger, stronger and more effective organisation.

1 Name _____

Address _____

Phone no _____

Email _____

2 I/We wish to have annual membership of CFPT as an:

Individual member £10

Individual student member £5

Group member* £30

Name of group* _____

3 I am a: (please tick one)

Regulated Tenant

Assured Shorthold Tenant

Assured Tenant

Housing Association Tenant

Leaseholder

Other _____

4 I would like to make a donation of (optional) £ _____

Total amount paid £ _____

Signed _____

Date _____

Please fill in your details and send (no stamp required) with payment to:

Camden Federation of Private Tenants
11-17 The Marr
FREEPOST LON12470
London
NW1 2YW

Or go to www.cfpt.org.uk and join online