

Southwark Group of Tenants
Organisation

BME Tenants

Market Research Report

Prepared for:

Samuel Koledoye
SGTO
Bells Gardens Community Centre
19 Buller Close
London SE15 6UJ

Prepared by:

Continental Research
132-140 Goswell Road
London EC1V 7DY
t: 020 7490 5944

Agency Contacts:

Stephanie Carnachan
Sarah Wynne

Month of Job:

September 2007

Job Number:

8933

BME Tenants

Table of Contents

1.	Background and Research Objectives	1
2.	Method and Sample	2
3.	Main Findings	4
3.1.	Attitudes towards living in Southwark.....	4
3.2.	Maintaining the local area.....	6
3.3.	Tenants and Residents Associations	8
3.4.	Encouraging participation in the T&RA	11
4.	Conclusions and Recommendations	14

APPENDIX I: GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Background and Research Objectives

Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations (SGTO) is an independent, non-profit making, voluntary organisation, representing and promoting the rights of tenants and residents groups throughout the London Borough of Southwark. SGTO is conscious that BME residents do not tend to engage with housing issues in the way that other groups do, and often do not get actively involved in their local tenancy and residents associations. As black residents make up 26% of Southwark's population (according to the 2001 Census) this represents a significant proportion of the population.

While the organisation has some hypotheses about why this might be the case, these are largely based on anecdotal evidence. As a result, SGTO wished to conduct some research to try to understand in greater depth why BME residents are not active in this area, and thus what could be done to encourage them to become more engaged with their local associations. Specific research objectives were as follows:

- To establish BME residents' perceptions of Tenants and Residents' Associations
- To understand the triggers and barriers to getting involved with the T&RA
- To understand how BME residents might best be encouraged to engage with their T&RAs

2. Method and Sample

Qualitative research was conducted amongst BME residents of Southwark.

Qualitative research is exploratory by nature, and as little was known at the outset about why BME groups are not engaging with their T&RAs, qualitative methods and techniques were used to give an understanding of residents' attitudes towards the issues outlined above. Group discussions were conducted, as the group environment provides a creative and dynamic forum for respondents to debate and discuss ideas and share their experiences and opinions.

All respondents had lived in the Borough for at least one year, and were either Council tenants or leaseholders. None were currently involved with their local Tenants and Residents' Association.

A total of 8 group discussions was conducted as follows:

Location	Group Profile	
'North' (Residents of Borough, Bermondsey, Rotherhithe)	Black African Family at Home C2DE	Black Caribbean Empty Nester / Retired C2DE
	Asian Pre-Family Aged 18-30 years C2DE	Black Caribbean Pre-Family Aged 18-30 years C2DE
'Central' (Residents of Peckham, Walworth, Camberwell, Dulwich)	Black African Pre-Family aged 18-30 years C2DE	Asian Family at Home C2DE
	Black African Empty Nester / Retired C2DE	Black Caribbean Family at Home C2DE

The groups were conducted on 15th and 16th August 2007, and were moderated by Stephanie Carnachan, Lizzie Horton and Sarah Wynne of Continental Research.

Recruitment was conducted by Continental Direct, and respondents were incentivised with £35 for attendance.

Each discussion lasted for approximately an hour and a half. Groups were held at Peckham Pulse and the Novas Contemporary Urban Centre.

3. Main Findings

3.1. Attitudes towards living in Southwark

A number of positive aspects of living in Southwark were revealed. The key elements were as follows:

- The proximity to central London and good transport links to and from London.
- The environment was a positive feature for some residents (depending upon location). Some described good parks and quiet and clean streets, others claimed that there were ever improving social facilities such as bars and restaurants (particularly residents of Borough) and some residents claimed that regeneration of certain areas was evident – for example Elephant and Castle and Peckham.
- A particularly positive element for many residents is the diversity of cultures living in the area, as this brings vibrancy and variety to the area – for example a variety of shops, restaurants and so on catering to different cultures. Some residents also perceive that the Borough offers a wide variety of cultural activities, such as shops, markets, festivals and museums.
- A perceived positive sense of community is also a positive for some residents. For many, it is simply because they have lived in the area for a long time, and feel familiar and comfortable there, others describe the local communities as being close knit and supportive of each other. However, attitudes towards the sense of community in Southwark, and the importance of this, did appear to vary by ethnicity, and this is discussed in more detail below.

“It’s lively, different people from different backgrounds and there are lots of social things going on – clubbing, shopping”
(Black African, Pre-Family)

Some negative aspects of living in Southwark were also put forward:

- Crime was almost always the first negative aspect about living in Southwark mentioned. This encompasses a variety of issues from anti-social behaviour (i.e. groups of people hanging around the streets) to drug problems and violent crime (such as gun and knife crime). Violent crime is also thought to be an increasing problem in some areas (particularly Peckham) – specifically gun crime, knife crime and drug dealing.
- For some residents, the physical environment is a source of dissatisfaction, and is described as poorly lit, dirty, overcrowded and busy with traffic. Some respondents also commented that in some areas the housing is of poor quality and that estates are run down and neglected – although the regeneration of some areas is also perceived positively, as mentioned above.
- Finally, the Borough is described by some as having some social problems, specifically a lack of activities for young people which is thought to be a particular problem, as it is perceived that this pushes young people onto the streets in groups, as well as presenting wider social problems due to the fear that bored young people turn to crime.

“I’ve lived in the area all my life and never had any physical problems, but it’s really rough and you hear about things going on, kids being violent”

(Asian, Family at Home)

While these are general themes that emerged, attitudes towards living in Southwark may be influenced by a range of factors, which may include age and lifestage or the length of time the resident has lived in the Borough. The location in which the respondents lived also appeared to have some impact upon perceptions, with Northern residents seemingly slightly more positive towards the Borough than those who lived in Southern parts. Northern residents appeared less likely to describe segregation or tensions between areas and communities, and although they felt like they were living fairly centrally to London, where it might not be expected that strong community feeling would be evident due to the urban setting, the fact that they knew

one or two neighbours generated a strong sense of community. Residents in the Central and Southern areas, however, seemed more inclined to describe tensions between communities (e.g. between the Black and Asian communities), and more likely to mention serious crime as a problem in the area – especially residents of Peckham. It should be noted, however, that residents of Dulwich were more positive than other Southern residents.

Some differences in attitude were also evident by ethnicity. Black Caribbean residents enjoy the diversity of the Borough and the mix of cultures, and for many this was a strong positive aspect of living in Southwark. They claim it is important to feel part of a community, and believe it is important to develop a community spirit. A community-minded attitude was less evident amongst Black African residents, who appeared more conscious of divisions between different ethnic groups, and appeared more likely to perceive segregation or racial issues within the Borough. Finally, Asian residents felt part of a close-knit group, but within the Asian community (rather than within the Borough). They strongly identify with other Asian residents, look out for and support each other, and deal with any community problems that do arise internally within the community. Some Asian residents who lived in Southern parts of the Borough (in particular Peckham) claimed to be conscious of racial tensions, and feel wary of the Black communities, who they perceive are prejudiced against them.

These overall attitudes towards being part of a community have some impact upon likelihood to get involved with the Tenants and Residents Association; however this is discussed in more detail later in the report.

3.2. Maintaining the local area

Two different mindsets were evident relating to how much the resident engages with the local area, and this has an impact upon propensity to get involved with T&RAs. Some residents display a ‘transient’ mentality, characterised by a lack of any apparent real connection to the local area, and as a result appear less interested in maintaining the area and the community. This may be for various reasons, for example because they don’t see their long-term future in the area, but not necessarily. Other residents had a more ‘stable’ mindset; they appear more engaged with the area and are

genuinely interested in investing in the upkeep of the area and the community. They are more likely to take a longer term view – particularly if children are present, but again not necessarily. For example, those with children may also display the ‘transient’ mentality and conversely those who have plans to leave the area may display the ‘stable’ mindset.

In general, residents spontaneously name the Council as the body most responsible for maintaining the local area. This is because they perceive that that is the purpose of the Council’s existence, and the reason why they pay Council Tax. Furthermore, as all respondents were Council tenants or leaseholders it is likely that the Council is relatively top of mind as this is who they contact in the first instance in the event of problems.

“It’s the Council’s responsibility – we pay Council Tax”

(Black African, Family at Home)

“It’s my job to make sure the Council knows if something isn’t working properly. It’s my responsibility to inform them”

(Asian, Family at Home)

Residents from the ‘stable’ mindset, however, are more likely to spontaneously mention the role that residents themselves can and should play in maintaining the area. This is because they believe that if you live in an area, you have a certain responsibility to look after it, and in addition that maintaining standards shows pride and self-respect in the area which in turn means that the environment is less likely to be abused by others, thereby perpetuating higher standards. Other residents were more likely to display an indifferent attitude with regards to residents’ responsibilities, and are more likely to believe that one person can’t make a difference. In addition, some who don’t envisage a long-term future in their area feel less inclined to care about what happens to the community.

Respondents believe that as residents there are various things that they could do to maintain and protect their community. These may be practical issues, such as keeping the exterior of your house clean and tidy, ensuring rubbish is not thrown

outside (for aesthetic reasons and also to prevent vermin and foxes) and to inform the Council of any problems as they arise, rather than waiting until things have fallen into disrepair. On a less practical level, residents claim they could work together to encourage activities for local kids (to reduce anti-social behaviour and petty crime), be a respectful neighbour and generally try to foster a community spirit, as there is a belief that residents are more likely to respect the area if they feel part of a community.

“Residents need to act responsibly, put their rubbish out – don’t just dump it”

(Black Caribbean, Empty Nester / Retired)

3.3. Tenants and Residents Associations

There was some spontaneous awareness of Tenants and Residents Associations amongst respondents, although for the most part respondents were not spontaneously aware of T&RAs. Of those that were aware, some had heard of residents’ meetings in their local area, although they may not be aware that they were a ‘formal’ arrangement rather than something residents had informally organised amongst themselves. Others claimed they had received leaflets through the door, or had friends and family who were involved in their T&RAs (either in Southwark or elsewhere), or the respondents themselves had come across the T&RA in other boroughs they had lived in.

Prior to further discussion during the groups, the concept of Tenants and Residents Associations was introduced to respondents as follows:

Tenants and Residents Associations are set up to meet the needs of tenants and residents. Their purpose is to enable tenants and residents to tackle issues and problems together, rather than individually. The Tenants and Residents Association provides regular contact with the Council. Tenants and residents’ views may be fed into Council decision-making processes. Tenants and residents may also campaign through their local Association on issues that affect them. The Tenants and Residents Association may also organise social events and activities.

Upon hearing more about T&RAs, respondents' initial reactions were generally positive. In principle, residents consider the idea of Tenants and Residents Associations as important, with the key benefits perceived to be the following:

- It offers a democratic forum for effecting change
- It is perceived that the power and weight of a group is more likely to achieve results than individual residents attempting to drive change
- The T&RA would provide a link between residents and the Council for residents to present their views and ideas
- It provides the opportunity for residents to raise and share ideas amongst themselves
- Involvement with the T&RA would help to build community spirit. All residents would be pulling together for the same thing, building a sense of shared purpose which in turn would have positive impact on the area overall

"They could have potential if used in the right way"

(Black Caribbean, Empty Nester / Retired)

"I think they would work, they are more likely to listen to our views because they are residents and tenants too, they are like us"

(Asian, Family at Home)

"A way to air views and release and share ideas"

(Black African, Family at Home)

However, some questions quickly arose and there was some confusion regarding exactly what the T&RA can do and what its precise role is. Respondents were unsure as to whether its purpose was to deal with issues related to housing, or issues relating to the wider environment. It was thought that for issues relating to housing in particular, it would be of no real benefit, as it would be quicker and more likely to

achieve a result if the resident contacted the Council directly, cutting out the 'middleman'. Some further barriers became evident, specifically:

- Residents are extremely reluctant to believe that the Council would take any action at all as a result of the meetings. They generally treat the Council with some suspicion and cynicism, and do not really believe that the Council has their interests as a priority; therefore it is hard for them to envisage that the Council will take the efforts of the T&RA seriously. This presents a major barrier to engagement with T&RAs, as the perception that they have no influence effectively negates the whole point of their existence

"They get everyone's opinion and take it to the Council, but the truth is the Council don't really listen to them"

(Asian, Family at Home)

- A perception that meetings could be dominated by one or two individuals, and that those who are most vocal would get what they want, thus meaning the meetings would not be a democratic process (which is the only perceived way that they can function effectively)
- A belief that it would be difficult - if not impossible - to have a cohesive approach. It was thought that everyone would have different needs, and it would be extremely challenging to translate these into actionable objectives
- A general lack of understanding of the purpose of T&RAs, and where, when and how meetings take place
- A belief that the meetings would be run by 'busybodies' who are motivated by self promotion rather than a genuine desire to help the community – indeed this is a key barrier, and is discussed in more detail below

Residents generally held negative perceptions of what it would be like to attend a T&RA meeting. They envisage that there would be a strongly negative atmosphere, and that sessions would operate as a forum for criticising other residents. They also

expect that the meetings would be attended by residents who are attracted to this negative, critical environment – generally thought to be older people (who they perceive as having nothing better to do) and / or people who have lived in the area for a long time and feel they have more claim on decisions affecting the community than newer residents might do. In addition, there is a fear of being the ‘new person’ or not fitting in with the rest of the group (particularly from an age perspective).

“I know people in the organisation and I would rather not get involved with them”

(Black Caribbean, Empty Nester / Retired)

Overall, the idea of a T&RA meeting does not constitute an enjoyable way of spending your free time, and furthermore there is a fear of being tarnished as a busybody yourself if you are seen to be getting involved. Therefore the combination of these factors and the perception that the T&RA has no real influence over the Council anyway (thus negating its usefulness) does not make the prospect of attending a meeting a particularly appealing one.

Residents claimed that they would be more likely to get involved in the T&RA if the role and purpose was more clearly explained and they were more aware of exactly what can be achieved – this could be demonstrated through communicating past successes and achievements. They would also be more likely to attend if they felt that there would be other people present who are similar to them, in terms of age, lifestage or gender.

3.4. Encouraging participation in the T&RA

It is most likely that residents will be encouraged to participate if the benefits of involvement are clearly communicated, and the T&RAs become more visible within the community. This might be done in several ways, as suggested by residents.

- A representative from the local T&RA calling door to door or phoning to tell residents about the T&RA would raise awareness, however quite a few respondents felt that this approach would be too intrusive and thus there is a danger it would compound perceptions that members were pushy and interfering

- Posting information leaflets through residents' doors or displaying them in communal areas would be a less intrusive approach, however there is the danger that this approach is too remote and as such it may be unlikely to grab residents' attention unless the benefits of joining the T&RA are clearly communicated
- Demonstrating the achievements and effectiveness of the T&RA is an important aspect of encouraging participation. This could be done in several ways, such as via email, leaflets or posters, but it is important that past achievements are clearly spelled out, using examples where possible

"There's a big communication issue. I have no idea where they are, how to contact them, how often they meet. They need to be more user friendly"

(Asian, Family at Home)

- Getting the T&RAs involved with other local events (e.g. festivals) would give residents the opportunity to find out more and meet those involved, this could be an effective way of encouraging participation, especially if a good cross-section of members attended such events (to dispel preconceptions that all members are old)

"They need to get come out and interact with the community, be accessible"

(Black Caribbean, Empty Nester / Retired)

- Promoting the local representative may also help, as residents would know where to go for information or to find out more about the meetings without having to commit to attending if they are not ready to
- Forging links between communities (e.g. Black and Asian) would demonstrate community feel and cohesion, again this could be done by attending events or festivals local to each ethnic community
- Residents also felt it was important to involve young people in some way. While they acknowledge that young people are unlikely to want to get involved with the main T&RAs, they believe that a youth representative or separate youth forums

might work in tandem with the main T&RAs, and interest could be generated by special young peoples' days, or attendance at young people clubs or groups (as long as a positive message was communicated about involvement with T&RAs). It was considered important to involve young people as they are thought to be the future of the area, thus it is important that they are encouraged to engage with their communities as soon as possible.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

All residents agree that community spirit is a key part of maintaining a safe and harmonious environment.

Some residents, however, appear more pre-disposed to accept their own part in fostering and maintaining the local community than others, and two mindsets were evident. The first was a 'transient' mindset, generally characterised by a lack of engagement with the local area and lack of interest in giving any of ones own time to improving the area or community. The second mindset was more 'stable', generally characterised by a willingness to work towards improving the community and engage with it on a number of different levels.

It is likely that those residents displaying the 'stable' mindset are those that are most likely to be encouraged to engage with their local areas via the T&RA, as it is important to them to feel they are playing their part in maintaining the area and community in which they live. Residents with the 'transient' mentality present more of a challenge, however with careful communication some could be persuaded to participate in their T&RAs, specifically if the benefits and past achievements are communicated to them, as it is unlikely this group will be motivated to get involved unless there is an explicit benefit to them personally of doing so.

Most residents within the sample were unaware of the formal existence of T&RAs in their local area. While they believe that T&RAs are a good idea in principle, there are two major barriers to participation – a belief that the T&RA holds no influence over the Council, and the Council would not accept recommendations or demands from residents, and a negative perception of the type of resident who would be involved in the T&RA.

Our recommendations to encourage participation can thus be summarised as follows:

- Communication with residents is crucial, and should focus on the role and purpose of the Tenants and Residents Association and demonstration of past achievements

- Consider messages direct from the Council to acknowledge the importance of T&RAs, how the Council interacts with them and actions the Council has taken as a result of relations with the T&RA, however it should be noted that any promise of involvement from the Council should be followed through or this will serve to compound cynicism regarding the Council's interest in the T&RAs
- Promoting the fun and social aspects of involvement would also be beneficial, as this may dispel the myth that meetings are simply a forum for negativity and convey a more light-hearted feeling
- The T&RAs should aim to become more visible where possible – by reaching out to the community and demonstrating that they are inclusive and that all are welcome, this could be done via attendance at events or more proactive approaches such as the planned Tenants Conference
- Emphasise that the role of the T&RA is to effect change for the benefit of everyone rather than to focus on negative issues

APPENDIX I: DISCUSSION GUIDE



J8933
SGTO BME Research
FINAL Discussion Guide – 1.5 HOUR GROUPS
16 July 2007

Objectives:

- Understand attitudes and perceptions regarding T&RAs
- Understand what could encourage BME residents' involvement with T&RA

1. Introduction / warm up

(10 MINS)

- Moderator / CR introduction
- Topic for discussion: Living in Southwark
- Group duration: 1.5 hours
- Confirm MRS guidelines / confidentiality / audio-recording / observers
- Respondent introduction
 - First name
 - Family situation / who lives in the household
 - Occupation
 - Hobbies
 - Where live in the Borough
 - Length of time lived in Southwark

2. Attitudes toward living in Southwark

(20 MINS)

- Spontaneous associations with living in Southwark. *Write on flipchart*
- What are the best things about your area?
- What are the worst things about your area?
- Which parts of the Borough do you normally spend time in? (e.g. work, shopping, socialising etc)
- If you were describing your area to someone who had never been there, what would you say?
- What would you like to see changed about your local area?
- How has your local area changed while you have been living here?
- How long do you anticipate staying in the Borough?
- What would encourage you to move?
- What would encourage you to stay within the Borough?

- Where did you live before your current area?
- If in another borough
 - Which borough was this?
 - What did you like / dislike about it
 - How does Southwark rate in comparison?
- If in Southwark
 - Whereabouts?
 - What was it like / how did it compare with current home?
- Thoughts on housing in Southwark generally
 - Likes / dislikes
 - Strengths / weaknesses
 - Concerns / issues
- How long have you lived in your current home for?
- Types of housing respondents live in – e.g. houses, flats, estates etc.
- Describe the specific area / environment / estate where you live
 - Likes / dislikes
 - What would you like to change about it?

3. Maintaining the Local Area	(25 MINS)
--------------------------------------	------------------

- Who is responsible for maintaining the residential area you live in? Why do you say that?
- For each body mentioned ask:
 - What is this group responsible for?
 - How well are they doing in maintaining the area?
 - What could they do to improve things?
 - What should their priorities be?

If not mentioned ask:

- What is the role of local residents?
- To what extent should they be responsible for maintaining the area? Why / why not?
- What can residents do to maintain the area? How can they contribute? *(list on flipchart)*
- To what extent do residents get involved where you live?
- What kind of things do they do?
- How important is it that residents get involved in looking after the area they live in? Why / why not?
- What are the advantages / disadvantages of residents getting involved in maintaining the area?
- What would encourage you to get more involved in maintaining the area you live in?
- What puts you off getting involved? What are the main reasons

4. Tenants and Residents Associations (T&RA)**(25 MINS)**

- Spontaneous impressions / associations?
- What comes to mind when I say “Tenants’ and Residents’ Association” (*write on flipchart*)
- Have you heard of a T&RA before? What have you heard?
- Has anyone ever been involved with their T&RA?
 - If yes, please describe how
 - If no, why not?
- What do you think is the purpose of the T&RA? What is it for / what do they do?
- What are the benefits?
- And what are the disadvantages?

Moderator: Introduce concept of Tenants’ and Residents’ Association

- Initial reactions / impressions
- What is the main purpose of the T&RA?
- How do you think it works? What does being involved entail?
- How important do you think T&RAs are? Why / why not?
- What are the benefits?
- What are the disadvantages?
- What would encourage you to get involved with your T&RA?
- What would put you off from getting involved? Why?
- Describe the typical person you think would get involved in their local T&RA
 - Age / lifestage, ethnicity, occupation, personality etc

6. Summary**(5 MINS)**

- How important do you think T&RAs are in maintaining the local area?
- What is the main advantage / disadvantage of the T&RA?
- What would encourage you to get involved with your T&RA?

THANK AND CLOSE