

## **APPG for Council Housing Submission - SGTO**

Council housing residents in Southwark are beset with a number of issues. To name but a few, this includes continuing failure and disrepair of their district heating systems, the construction of infill and rooftop homes, and Council transparency. These three issues were identified in a survey of residents conducted in February 2021, but other issues include isolation in communities, and the cut to the £20 per week universal credit uplift – representing the single largest cut in welfare in the UK in post-war History

The SGTO is the independent voice of council housing residents in Southwark. Yet the Council is only guaranteeing us funding until October 2022, after which point we will go out to tender as an ‘advice service’ – a definition that only encapsulates a small amount of our work. We are leading a legal challenge against the Council, and we will continue to fight for the interests of residents.

### **Council transparency**

If residents have a concern they want to raise to the Council, fewer channels are open to them for influencing Council decision making.

- Local Area Housing Forums are ill-attended by residents, without minutes taken and without resident involvement in the creation of the agenda.
- Across the borough, residents are being let down by the Council’s consultation structures, with residents without internet access being excluded from accessing consultations.
- Other social landlords in the borough are behaving similarly. Based on a consultation of 33% of estate residents, CBS Leathermarket still wishes to pursue the demolition of a ball court on the Elim Estate, despite a petition signed by 71% of residents of the Estate rejecting this.

### **Repairs/heating**

Many of Southwark’s system-built estates are suffering not only from mould and damp, but their district heating systems have fallen into disrepair.

- A resident with district heating systems may end up being charged twice – once for their faulty heating system, and then they have to pay to power a generator to actually heat their home in the winter months.

- Southwark does offer a compensation scheme for residents using such generators, but this compensation is retrospective, meaning households can build up debts in the meantime.
- This is on top of the inconvenience of having frequent repair works in your home to fix a system that is likely to break down again in a short period of time.
- Leaseholders face the additional burden of having to pay for often costly repair works.

District heating failures are common in Southwark, with the following estates being particularly affected:

- Kipling Estate
- Rennie Estate
- St Saviours Estate
- Brandon Estate
- Sceaux Gardens
- Rouel Road
- Wendover and Taplow Houses in the Aylesbury Estate
- Castlemead

Yet instead of investing in extensive repair works across their housing stock, Southwark Council insists on building more hastily constructed, system-built rooftop homes that are likely to experience similar issues in future.

### **New homes in Southwark**

11 estates in Southwark are faced with the prospect of rooftop home extensions. Yet the majority of tenants and residents associations in Southwark oppose the construction of rooftop homes.

Residents at Chilton Grove Estate – where rooftop homes have recently been completed - lived underneath scaffolding for almost two years, and building contractors regularly broke working hours and noise limits.

Beyond the immediate issues of construction, residents are worried about the construction of rooftop homes on blocks that are pre-1970 and are not designed to withstand disproportionate collapse. On one estate, Southampton Way, residents wrote a letter of concern to the Council, citing the Estate's age and inability to withstand extra wind pressure (caused by new storeys) as a reason for building work not to proceed. An Arup feasibility report,

commissioned by the Council, stated that pre-1970 buildings are not “designed for disproportionate collapse and most are unlikely to meet the requirements.” In spite of this, Southwark Council continues to pursue its policy of rooftop homes.

### **Summary**

At a time when Southwark’s council housing residents are beset with a complex array of different issues, it is vital that they have an independent voice to represent their interests to a Council that often ignores their concerns.

We are speaking at this call to evidence to raise awareness of issues faced by Southwark residents, but also to demonstrate the need for the SGTO to keep fighting their corner.