



Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations

Bells Gardens Community Centre,
19 Buller Close, London,

Campaigning for Housing Rights and Council Homes

SE15 6UJ

Minutes of SGTO Group Meeting

Held on Wednesday 27th October 2021, by Online ZOOM

Present: 23 attendees

Staff: Margaret Onwuta, Amanda Carey, Ahmed Kabba, Silvia Rahim, Rita Edmond, Jack Lewis

1. **Welcome and introductions:**

Cris welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies from TRAs:

Rockingham, Gloucester Grove, Alvey, Cherry Gardens and Brimington.

2. **Minutes of Group meeting held on 22nd September 2021 and Matters Arising:**

Minutes proposed by Beverley Graham and seconded by Cris Claridge.

Agreed

Matters Arising:

(4) New Homes Network. The actions are that SGTO would create a document that outlines the council's commitments to fair consultation, which we can use to challenge them at the Councils Assembly on the 24th of November. This document is a work in progress.

(5) Future Funding for SGTO: It was agreed that a working group would be set up and the names are as follows: - Cris, Margaret, Chris, Lara, Munu and Althea. Cris mentioned that it will be good to have more members on the group but that might happen after the first working group have met in the next few weeks. **It was agreed that the SGTO would write a press release.**

3. **SGTO Annual General Meeting** Update from SGTO Company Secretary, Margaret Onwuta
Margaret reported that she contacted the Charity Commission and Companies House and the advice they gave was to present the accounts for 2020-2021 at the November Group Meeting. The AGM and the presentation of the 2021-2022 accounts will be held in September 2022. For now, the current board members can be given the option to remain until the September AGM or to step down, and new members can be co-opted on to the board.

Actions agreed: Charity Commission's advice accepted.

Cris mentioned that there are vacancies on the board, and that will be an opportunity from the membership to co-opt further members. The board is also looking at where there are skills gaps so when the notice is published, the skills that are needed can be addressed. Cris informed the



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group that this year has been a relentless year for the SGTO with lots of work ahead for the Board Members and Staff. That's why a full membership is needed to spread the workload.

Actions agreed: The Board will investigate and inform the membership of the skills gaps for consideration when nominating or volunteering for co-option to the Board.

Cris informed the group that SGTO is under the process of a culture change. An organisation, The Good Governance Institute (GGI) have been asked to look very closely at the work undertaken by the SGTO to give advice on how SGTO might work differently and more efficiently. Cris will send notice out to the full membership to explain how this will work.

Actions agreed: Cris will keep the membership informed.

4. What has been happening since our September Group Meeting?

Reports:

• New Homes Network, Meeting with Michael Scorer, Strategic Director of Modernisation and Housing and Stuart Davis (Director of New Homes Programmes in Southwark). 13th October 2021

Jack spoke about the composition of the New Homes Network. He explained that the Network is a group of TRA members from across Southwark who come together to discuss the council's plans to build on their estates. They meet regularly and at the last meeting they had a question-and-answer session with Michael Scorer, and Stuart Davis. Questions were asked about the safety of rooftop homes, but it was felt that not all were answered. Jack referred members to the website for more information and explained that the minutes of the meeting are available. SGTO now sits under Environment and Leisure, and it has become more difficult to access information as we are not always clear as to who we should speak to

Tanya Murat (Yes 2 Fair Redevelopment, Southwark Defend Council Housing) encouraged people to attend the march taking place on the night of Council Assembly on 24th November

• All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) meeting 25th October 2021

Jack and Cris attended the above meeting to represent SGTO.

Jack reported that he spoke at the APPG meeting and explained that each speaker was allowed three minutes.

The theme of the SGTO presentation was tenant involvement and Jack completed the speech by saying

'We urge the APPG for Council Housing to consider what protection might be offered to tenant federations such as our own, and what role national bodies such as the Regulator of Social



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Housing could play in reviving tenant involvement in the decision-making of registered social landlords. "

Jack & Cris also submitted a paper on behalf of the SGTO outlining the wider issues Southwark tenants are addressing.

• **Tenant Forum 25th October 2021**

Althea (Chair of the Forum) attended the above meeting and Michael Scorer was in attendance. A report about fire safety was presented by the council officers and the paper was accepted by the Forum.

Cris expressed concern that delegates to the Tenants Forum are individuals and do not represent anyone other than themselves. She wondered how important issues discussed and information presented at the Forums was relayed to the wider tenant's movement; particularly as no minutes of the meeting are taken.

• **Homeowners Forum 20th October 2021:**

Tom Lloyd reported that the meeting was attended by five people and fifteen council officers. The first item discussed was the Terms of Reference which still haven't been approved. Tom said that he was not happy about it. The next item was a presentation from Citizens Advice Bureau about building safety. According to them it was a tick box exercise.

After discussion it was agreed that we should explore ways to record the meetings of all tenants/homeowners forums and area forums and distribute notes/minutes to T&RAs

5. **How do WE restart our T&RAs?** A discussion on (re) engaging new/existing TRA members as halls' re-open

Damien Cheetham, Lant & Bittern T&RA, opened the discussion by sharing some of his experiences since the lifting of lock down.

Damien Cheetham said that he had asked for this agenda item because he would like to discuss how TRAs can restart and start engaging with residents. He went on to say that communications at grassroot level is very important and needs to be discussed as it is lacking in several areas. He also mentioned how much connectivity had been achieved with neighbours and friends through zoom and other platforms.

Lant & Bittern T&RA has been running for a number of years. Some of the older people involved are not able to carry on while some have moved on. The situation after the pandemic is that they have a lack of volunteers and Damien wondered if other representatives could give some advice



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moving forward. Damien explained that whilst they do not have a hall, they have managed to run some activities. During the pandemic, neighbours have pulled through to help each other.

Members gave various ideas, such as having coffee mornings in a church hall, coffee shop, and where there are much older people in community, volunteers have been recruited.

SGTO staff gave their experiences on how they work with TRAs that are functioning, some meeting up on zoom and others that are meeting up in person. The concern is the weather is getting colder and people are limiting the way they meet and do outdoor activities. Cris spoke about a family café that has been opened in East Dulwich which is busy enabling parents to meet with one another with activities provided for the children She suggested that it might be worth looking into.

Cllr O'Brien was concerned that people are not getting in touch with their councillors to help sort out the issues on the ground. He said that members must continue to push their councillors to do more.

Concerns were raised that some residents do not have a hall. It was suggested that residents should investigate sharing with others who have tenant's hall. Cris suggested SGTO put together a package to help tenants but also advised tenants to join the What's App group if they haven't done so yet.

Actions agreed: Cris to look into the idea of a café style family setup at Bells Gardens

6. Any Other Business

Questions were asked as to why it is so difficult for some of Councillors to attend TRA meetings? Several people shared the same view that they did not have support from their local Councillors.

A member asked that coming up to an election year, if TRAs want to invite some of the opposition candidates to speak at their committee meetings to hear what other parties are offering, who should they contact?. It was suggested that holding hustings would be a good idea. By inviting politicians to come along to TRA meetings tenants can hear what they have to say, question them, and get them to commit to what they do for constituencies.

Cllr O'Brien agreed that him and his team would happily do that if invited to TRA meetings. He suggested that six weeks before an election is a good enough time to hold hustings as it fresh in people's minds.

Cris said that the SGTO used to hold hustings before every election to give TRAs the opportunity to meet with prospective councillors/MPs. If members needed advice on how to organise a husting on their estates they could contact the SGTO



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A member stated that residents should rely on their own actions and solidarity and campaign actions to get the change they need.

There was a final call out to bring people together by joining the demonstration on 24th November organised by (say yes 2 Fair Redevelopment movement).

Meeting ended at 9.10pm

Date of next meeting: 24th November 2021