



Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations

Campaigning for Housing Rights and Council Homes

*Bells Gardens Community Centre
19 Buller Close, London
SE15 6UJ*

Group Meeting Minutes Wednesday 24th November 2021, 7.00pm – 9.00pm

Attendance: 18

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

1. Welcome, Introductions & Apologies

Cris Claridge (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting, Mel Friend from Kleinman Graham Accountants and announced that attendance may be a bit low due to a march organised by Yes To Fair Development outside Tooley Street, where a number of our members will be attending.

Cris confirmed that this was not an AGM, but we are presenting accounts for 2020/2021 as there would not be an AGM until September 2022, where accounts for 2021/2022 would be presented.

Apologies: Bells Gardens TRA x 1 (CN)
Acorn TRA x 1 (AS)

2. Minutes of Group Meeting held on 27th October 2021 & Matters Arising

Matters Arising:

- a. Agreed that SGTO would write a press release on the future funding of SGTO, this is ongoing with Cris, Margaret and Jack and will be circulated to membership once completed. **Action**
- b. SGTO would investigate the skills gap within the board for co-option onto the board, this will be done after the review has been carried out by GGI (Good Governance Institute) where a report will be issued in January for co-opting in February.

Agreed as a true record, proposed by: Marjorie Lewis,
seconded by: Peter Davis

3. SGTO Audited Accounts for 2020/2021

Annual report was presented for last financial year 1st April '20 to 31st March '21 by Amanda

The first part of the report was a message from the SGTO Chair, Cris, who explained what had happened during this year. It then goes on to show a brief outline of some of what SGTO had managed to do during this period with the lockdown being in place to assist people. This ranged from providing a space for a foodbank, which was one of the many valuable sites across the borough assisting vulnerable people. The mobiles and tablets we

sourced to give away for free, were a great way to get people connected and included during isolation and to keep people warm, the winter warmer packs went down a treat. Originally being given 50, but after a lot of badgering, managed to give away 100 packs which included woolly hat, gloves and thermal mug. Most recent event, was the London Legal Walk, where Cris, Jack and little Robbie courageously ventured into the cold to walk to raise funds. Finally, there was the 10k get connected at xmas grant. This was built up from £5k from LBS and £5k from United St Saviours. The money was given to us to distribute, and we received requests from 29 TRA's advising how many people they wanted to help within their estates, which equated to 1045 residents, and we then provided them with the funds. From the feedback we compiled the report showing comments and photographs from recipients. It was a wonderful opportunity for us to be able to spread joy and gave us a warm fuzzy feeling by doing something so magical.

The SGTO services log was then explained, which gave an oversight into how many people have received items/services from us during this year. This covered mobiles, arts & craft boxes which were sourced from the Met Police and given to children across the borough, to the printing and accounts service and many more. We started offering printing and accounts in April and June, which proved valuable to the 192 print requests and 31 account verifications during this period. Online courses provided people with skills and certifications needed for halls and other courses gave people something to do whilst stuck at home and the provisions of hiring our tables and chairs, assisted the TRA's to holding safe outdoor activities. The t-shirts we had printed to raise funds for NHS and support workers are still available, so people can contact us to put in their requests, £10 each. The very first care packs we compiled, were hand delivered by Amanda and Silvia across the North and South of the borough on 24th March, the day after lockdown.

Financial statement was next, where it was explained that individual spreadsheets for both SGTO and Bells had been included so people could see the breakdown for each organisation, as the report completed by the accountants, was combined.

It was explained that items in red are generally monies that do not have any financial benefit to the SGTO, for example, the £10k was given to us to give out, the Ledbury fund is to cover expenses for Ledbury, not to be used for anything else. There was no Summer Fest, or Football tournament due to lockdown, so all are general running cost expenses. The same applied to Bells, as the centre was closed, so no income, apart from the furlough payment received from HMRC for the caretaker. Insurances still needed to be paid and CCTV and alarm maintenance needed to be upheld, which was more important with the building being left unattended for longer periods.

Gratitude was expressed to the SGTO for everything they have done, which was reciprocated to all the TRA's for showing such wonderful community spirit.

Accounts adopted, proposed by: Chris Meregini

seconded by: Dario Blake

Agreed as a true record with 1 abstention

4. Co-option of Board Members for 2021/2022 for information

Chris Meregini (vice-chair) announced that the current trustees had been asked to complete a survey as to whether they wish to remain on the board until the next AGM in September 2022. The outcome of this indicated that we currently have 10 board members, with 5 vacancies and with the report from GGI, we will be able to identify the skills set required to co-opt further trustees, which will be advertised within our membership.

5. **How do we monitor the accomplishments of Area Forums, Tenants & Homeowners Forums and ensure they are accountable to the residents of the Borough?**

Cris asked everyone present if they still attend or have attended their Area Forums and the general feeling.

Some people had attended at least one, but feel that they are badly handled, contradictory in that you can only stand for election if present, but then electing those not present without a vote, terms of reference promised and presentations by officers, but never circulated. Significant difficulty in trying to register for meetings and lack of communication are barriers and do not help. The meetings are not recorded (they state due to privacy) and no minutes are taken, so there is no evidence of discussions had, which is a major issue.

Cris said that it is difficult to discuss how we monitor these meetings when very few attend, often because of the issues they face when they trying to join. This is having devastating effect on the tenant's movement. Whilst we believe we had a good consultation structure, we acknowledge that it needed updating to bring it into the 21st century, however the Council have destroyed it completely. The new proposals by the council have to be assessed after a year, so it is imperative that we have a say in how these meetings have been conducted, otherwise, the council will report that they are a success and continue to being able to do whatever they please without consultation.

Suggestions on monitoring:

- a. Ask council to audio record and share if they can't video record
- b. Set up a working group to gather observations and send out a survey for how people want these meetings conducted and forward findings to the council
- c. Try to get some publicity from Southwark News to ask why aren't you attending, do you know about these meetings and what are your experiences when you've attended.
- d. Could SGTO set up own forum meetings to mirror those of the council, where tenants would set agenda and meetings could be recorded, this would hopefully alert council that they are doing something wrong and encourage them to change their process.

The issue with this is that the council set up these meetings to consult with us, so would we be in a position to get the appropriate Councillors to attend to give the information that we need.

Rita said that she had received no comments from TRA members with her area but could directly ask the question to gather feedback.

Outcome: to compile a questionnaire that outreach workers can take to their meeting to gather feedback and put out to our membership to get a bigger perspective across the borough. **Action**

Volunteers who agreed to be part of this group to meet and design questionnaire:

Cris Claridge, Chris Meregini, Tina Smith, Peter Davis

With: Rita Edmond and Ahmed Kabba

6. **SGTO Campaign Committee** –

Jack spoke of the proposal to start a new campaign committee as there is a requirement for an essential group of people to coordinate what subjects/issues need to be campaigned on.

New Homes, Fuel Poverty, Financial Hardship to name but a few...

See discussion paper below:

Briefing Paper: SGTO Campaigns Committee

Context

The SGTO established a Campaigns Committee in 2013, the purpose of which was to decide upon which issues the SGTO would campaign on, and to coordinate campaign actions. This committee was supported by the SGTO's Campaign and Research Officer. The Committee met monthly and operated for a number of years, ceasing operations shortly after the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

What we propose

With your consent, we propose to re-establish this Campaigns Committee, to decide upon which key issues we will campaign on and to coordinate campaign actions.

Why we want to re-establish the Committee

We want to ensure that all our campaigning work is truly representative of the needs of tenants and residents in the borough of Southwark. As part of this effort, tenants and residents should have a leading role in deciding what we campaign on and how we campaign. The SGTO is here to work for you and we want to make sure that we campaign based on priorities set directly by tenants and residents. Having a dedicated Campaign Committee will enable tenants and residents to develop long-term campaigns that continue to be led by tenant and resident need.

Structure of the Campaigns Committee

The Campaigns Committee would meet monthly. At the first meeting of the year, the Committee would decide upon up to four key issues that the SGTO would campaign on. These issues would be reviewed on an annual basis, but there would be a mid-year review at six months, where committee members would be able to drop/adapt campaign issues if they feel there is a need to do so.

A yearly plan, with campaign objectives, would be created for the SGTO's campaigns based on the first meeting of the year. This would also be reviewed on a yearly basis, with an optional amendment of the plan after six months.

The Committee would meet monthly to review progress on the yearly plan and to decide on the actions required to achieve plan objectives.

The venue of these meetings will be decided at the first meeting of the Campaign Committee, which would take place over Zoom. Committee members will also elect a chair at this first meeting, with the Campaign and Research Officer acting as an interim chair for the first meeting. The role of the Chair would be to facilitate meetings, develop the agenda (in consultation with Committee members) and act as a liaison between the Campaign Committee and the SGTO Board and Staff Team.

While the Campaign Committee will consist of a core voting membership, all SGTO members are welcome to join their meetings to listen, comment and suggest actions to the Committee.

Membership of the Campaign Committee

The Campaign Committee will be composed of 12 voting members, each of which must themselves be members of a Tenants and Residents Association (TRA). The Chair of the SGTO, and the Campaign and Research Officer, will be present as non-voting members of

the Committee. In the event of a tie, the Chair of the Campaigns Committee will have a deciding vote.

The membership of the Campaign Committee will represent the whole of Southwark. How we achieve this will be decided based on discussion with the SGTO membership.

If a TRA is interested in fielding a member for the Campaign Committee, the TRA can decide upon a member to go forward to a special election in January 2022. The SGTO, in consultation with tenants and residents, will decide upon how voting will take place. All SGTO members can vote. The first meeting of the Campaign Committee would take place in February 2022.

Elections to the Campaign Committee would take place annually.

If we decide to go ahead with the new campaign committee, the elections will take place in January, with the first meeting in February. Interested members must be affiliated to a TRA and can be anyone from the committee. This is just a proposal and open to suggestions to ensure we are inclusive, but the group would be accountable to the SGTO membership.

Details will be circulated and information presented at the next group meeting in January.

Action

7. SGTO Website Presentation

Amanda gave a brief presentation on the new website to show what we have done so far, what is included within pages and their intentions going forward.

Home page has been adjusted and now includes any information, activities that we are made aware of that could be of benefit to our members. Gives a brief insight and where provided, a link to the poster/flyer to offer further information by clicking on the blue writing.

We welcome any information to be sent to us that we can display to reach a wider audience in addition to sharing through email.

About Us is all about the organisation and history and show the staff and board of trustees.

Services has a main page where each subheading can be seen and accessed, alternatively you can select the service from the drop-down subpages where information is given. Example, the accounts page shows you what is required by us to complete verification.

Campaign & Research has various Policy Briefs and information on the New Homes Network, where all documents give you the option to download/print.

TRA's is a new page, where the intention could be to create subpages for various TRA's that do not have a website, to offer them a platform to share information with their tenants. This facility has not been advertised yet, but Margaret will do that soon.

Forum is a platform, where people can have conversations and discussions on matters of concern, much like the WhatsApp, but on the computer. People would contact us to register, where we would create a username which would then be emailed to the individual to validate and create their own password. They could then login and start or reply to a conversation. The intention is to create a short video to circulate to show people how to do this, which is a work in progress.

You can use the main to chat, but new topics can be created or use any of the existing already on the forum from the dropdown.

Events show past events and it is in the process of being updated, it gives the main header and when you click on specific topic, it opens to show more details and pictures related to that header.

Information has a main page and then subpages showing specific categories. Useful links has links to various organisations or literature to assist our membership and is constantly updated with new information received.

Meeting dates has a list of all 2022 dates and provides link to zoom group meeting. There was a calendar on here where the intention was to add other group meetings, council, etc. but the plugin was influencing other applications on the website, so we are looking at other versions.

Minutes, provides previous meeting minutes with the option to download/print. Southwark Councillors is an updated list of the new current councillors within the borough of Southwark with their contact details.

Hall Hire shows costs, terms, downloadable contract, calendar for each room indicating availability and a booking form to complete.

Contact shows where we are, transport to reach us, and an option where people can send a message which is received by all staff to ensure a response.

Amanda concluded by saying that it has been a great experience and we have thoroughly enjoyed seeing a transformation from when the website was given to us, to what we have now. We hope that with all the new information we will be adding on a regular basis will encourage people to use the website and find it most beneficial.

Meeting Closed: 9pm

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 26th January 2022