



Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations

Bells Gardens Community Centre,
19 Buller Close, London,

SE15 6UJ

Campaigning for Housing Rights and Council Homes

Group Meeting Minutes Wednesday 7th December 2022, 7:00 – 9:00pm Zoom

Contents of Minutes

- Minutes of Meeting: pages 1 to 13.
- Agreed Actions: page 13.
- Appendices: pages 14 to 23.

Minutes

Staff: Margaret Onwuta, Amanda Carey, Ahmed Kabba, Georgie Hodges, Jack Lewis

Attendees: 26

Apologies: Jennifer Quinton-Chelley, Henry Mott, Steve Evans, Beverley Graham, Carol Vincent.

1. Welcome and Introduction

Chris explained that this meeting will serve as a follow-up to the meeting between the SGTO and Council Officers on 12th October 2022. This meeting will provide the Council with the opportunity to express themselves directly to members, and for members to raise questions. The subject of tonight's meeting is SGTO's funding, the services it offers, and the tendering process it is expected to go through.

Councillor Merrill informed us that John McCormack and Cheryl Russell are unwell and thus unable to join the meeting.

2. The Future of the SGTO

Guest Speakers present:

Councillor Darren Merrill – Cabinet Member for Council Homes and Homelessness

Nat Stevens – Resident Involvement Manager

1. Panel questions



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These questions were posed by SGTO Board Members and directed to Councillor Merrill and Nat. The panel questions were followed by an 'open discussion' session where the general membership asked questions of Councillor Merrill and Nat.

Cris Claridge questions:

Cris delivered a short History of the SGTO, followed by three questions.

The SGTO originated from the Association of London Housing Estates (LHE), an organisation created by the London County Council in the late 1950s. In 1984, Southwark tenants created their own organisation in order to protect tenants' rights and their involvement in decision making. Tony Plum and Ron Valentini, two tenant representatives from Dulwich, set up the organisation, supported by Lew Evans, a representative on the LHE, and supported by TRA representatives from across Southwark. Council representatives were invited to a seminar with TRA representatives. This led to a tenant representative being present at every Council meeting, and to the creation of the 'Southwark Group of Tenants Associations', later changed to its current name of 'Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations' following the introduction of the Right to Buy.

Cris mentioned a number of tenant activists involved in the SGTO who later became councillors: Alan Crane (Chair of Housing: 1987 to 1989), Mark Howarth (initiated the Tenants' Levy in 1990 as Chair of Housing), Jeremy Fraser (Leader of Southwark Council), and Roy Kennedy (Councillor, and now a member of the House of Lords). Cris herself was Vice Chair of Housing (1994 to 1997) and became Chair of Housing in 1998. Piers Corbyn was a Councillor, and Althea Smith was a Councillor and Mayor of Southwark.

The Council has worked in partnership with the SGTO to address challenges to tenants' rights, including those posed by new Government legislation. In 1988, the North Peckham and Gloucester Grove Estates were designated as one of six pilot Housing Action Trusts (HATs). SGTO mounted a successful campaign against this and won the right to a ballot. Tenants subsequently voted against the HAT. Mark Howarth implemented the Tenants Levy following research he had done into the Swedish Union of Tenants. The activities of the SGTO were in line with the principles of this Union. This included ensuring everyone has the right to good housing at an affordable cost, promoting better housing for the tenants of today and tomorrow, identifying and promoting tenant involvement, and political neutrality. The SGTO provides support in dealing with landlords, and we lobby policy makers to ensure tenants' housing is improved, and we help tenants to personally make a difference to their housing.



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10p per week was added to rents in the form of the Tenants' Levy, to fund TRAs and SGTO, who would work with tenants to create TRAs where they did not exist. Multiple attempts were made to disband the fund – on one occasion the SGTO almost went to a judicial review with the Council – but the levy continued until the beginning of the 2020 Lockdown.

Cris emphasised that you only needed to look at the SGTO's activities during Lockdown to understand its worth.

Questions from Cris:

Question: When did the culture of a Labour Council change so drastically that it no longer recognises the role that a boroughwide tenants' voice can play?

Answer: Councillor Merrill disputed the phrasing of the question, affirming the importance of resident involvement and the SGTO.

Cris highlighted a disparity between what she saw as Councillor Merrill's support and the actions of the Council. Cris was concerned that the relationship between the SGTO and the Council had gradually broken down, and that the SGTO no longer had as much of an ability to work with councillors to form policies.

Question: do you acknowledge that the decision to create a Tenants' Levy in 1990 was an additional 10p rent increase, separate to the main rent?

Answer: Councillor Merrill was unable to provide an answer but promised to research this with Nat. Nat said that part of the Residents' Service Charge is used to fund resident participation. Nat agreed to get exact figures from the Director of Finance, looking into what proportion is given to TRAs. Nat stated that the Council are also consulting on rents at the moment – the meeting for tenants will be on 11th January, and for homeowners on 12th January. Councillor Merrill mentioned that he also wanted to consult with Cris in this research process.

Question: during a time of housing crisis, so much energy has been given over to fighting for the SGTO's existence, but all of its energy should be in working with tenants across the borough. Can you justify why we have been put into that position?

Answer: Councillor Merrill could not justify it, and promised to work with SGTO in future. Councillor Merrill hoped that the SGTO would be able to survive, flourish and improve. Nat emphasised the importance of having a constructive relationship with SGTO – he has attended the SGTO Tenants Conference and the Annual General



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Meeting, along with a meeting with the Chair. Nat mentioned that he sent Chris a draft of the New Resident Involvement Strategy, which the Council wants to work with SGTO to finalise. Nat wanted the SGTO to be involved in setting standards and monitoring the Council's performance on resident involvement.

Dario Blake questions:

Dario read Al-issa Munu's question on his behalf. Al-issa came in during the question and introduced himself to Councillor Merrill and Nat.

Question: the Council seeks to withdraw funding from SGTO and instead go out to tender. The Council is unsure what new service will be covered in the new arrangement, but it refers to an advice agency as a supplier. Why would the Council seemingly seek to dismantle the existing arrangement with SGTO, which no doubt would impact on the tenants and residents significantly? SGTO is not just an advice service – where is the support for TRAs? Who will attend their meetings to offer support and advice? Who will audit their accounts? Who will provide resources and photocopying? Where is the youth programme? Who will take care of our most vulnerable residents like we did during COVID-19 and Lockdown? Who will build the confidence of individuals so that they can have a voice? Who will campaign against the Council when residents believe that they are getting it wrong? Does Southwark Borough Council believe that SGTO is doing its job so well that they seek to silence it and have an easier life? Is SGTO seen as a threat?

Answer: Councillor Merrill said that the Council must get value for money for residents, hence the tendering process. Councillor Merrill stated that he did not see SGTO having an issue with the tendering process, considering the quality of services they are already providing. But Councillor Merrill emphasised the need for balances and checks, and tendering is one of these.

Nat emphasised the need to work with residents to resolve issues collaboratively, and that this is the only way to make progress. Nat also stated that the Council's funding to SGTO is worth nearly half a million pounds, and that the Council is obliged to review this funding by working with SGTO to assess the work it is undertaking. Nat stressed the need for him and SGTO to work together to collect empirical data to aid this process. Nat said that if Government auditors were to review the Council's funding of SGTO, the Council would be obliged to show that its funding of SGTO is justified. Nat mentioned the death of Awaab Ishak and the Secretary of State's letter to councils asking them to ensure resident empowerment – SGTO is part of this process and the Council is willing to work with SGTO. The SGTO's current work could be used as a



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benchmark for other organisations entering the tendering process. The SGTO would find itself at an advantage within the tendering process itself, but the Council must still show that it has gone through the due diligence of tendering.

Chris Meregini corrected Nat's estimation of funding – the figure is £248,000 per year, so closer to a quarter of a million pounds rather than half a million.

Al-issa was concerned that when the Council is looking at SGTO's role, it cannot reconcile the difference between the support SGTO provides and the advice it provides. The SGTO is managed by tenants who are able to determine what is good for them. Phrases like 'value for money' have no meaning here – the Council has an obligation to consult residents through the SGTO, particularly considering the shortcomings of the Council's new consultation structures. Tenants are service users and have the right to determine the service they receive. This is why Al-issa disputes the idea of tendering – SGTO should not be subject to this as it must remain in its current form, in order to hold the Council to account. Al-issa said the Council's treatment of SGTO is undemocratic, as tenants are denied a say in the process.

Councillor Merrill agreed with the importance of voter involvement and resident engagement. He also acknowledged that the current consultation structure is not fair or reasonable. Councillor Merrill recognised that Southwark Council has 110,000 tenants – the SGTO is part of that resident voice but is not the whole of it. The Council needs to work with SGTO to make sure everyone has a say, and Councillor Merrill recognised that previous tragedies, including Grenfell, have occurred when councils have not listened to their tenants. Councillor Merrill is committed to working with SGTO to ensure that all residents are listened to, and he acknowledged that the Council had, in some respects, lost its way in this regard.

Chris said that at times it has felt like the Council has imposed decisions on SGTO, and that this meeting is an opportunity for residents to express themselves honestly.

Nat acknowledged that the SGTO can, as a partner, help the Council give power back to local people. Nat recognised the value of working with the SGTO but stressed the need for the Council to meet its regulatory obligations with regards to funding. By being part of the review and evidencing process involved in tendering, the SGTO can prove its value for money by evidencing what it does.

Councillor Merrill emphasised that the tendering process would secure the SGTO's future by proving beyond reasonable doubt that it offers a value for money service.



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Councillor Merrill mentioned that some people have been questioning the SGTO's value for money.

Cris asked the Council why they want to make the SGTO compete with other organisations when they are openly acknowledging the successes of SGTO. Cris suggested that it would be more productive for SGTO to focus on bettering the lives of residents, rather than fighting for its own existence.

Councillor Merrill again stressed the need to use the tendering process to evidence that SGTO is value for money. He believed that the SGTO would be in a strong position to bid for the services it currently provides.

Dario said that Councillor Merrill and Nat are misunderstanding the viewpoint of residents in this meeting. Dario said that SGTO is more akin to an elected councillor than a contractable service. If you have a councillor who is underperforming, you do not contract the role of councillor out to a private entity, you vote in a different councillor at the next election.

Julie Phipps read out a supporting statement from the Southwark Unite Branch Secretary, Neil Tasker [see Appendix 5, page 23].

Councillor Merrill agreed with Neil Tasker, that the Council needs robust resident engagement. Councillor Merrill recognised that this robust questioning is part of the SGTO's work. The Council looks forward to working with the SGTO on a number of issues. Councillor Merrill mentioned that the Government had thrown a hand grenade into the Council's finances, and that the SGTO and the Council need to work together in this tough fiscal climate.

Chris questioned the Council's logic. If this is a difficult time and the Council needs the SGTO's help, surely it would make more sense to focus on what work can be achieved together, rather than going through a lengthy tendering process. The SGTO is made up of the same residents it serves – Chris questioned whether any other organisation could offer this. The prospect of tendering is making residents frustrated.

Councillor Merrill agreed that the money given to SGTO comes from tenants' contributions. Councillor Merrill did not have concerns that SGTO wouldn't get the contract. Councillor Merrill said that himself and Nat need to be able to answer the question of how SGTO's funding is being used in order to secure the organisation's future. Councillor Merrill recognised that this would involve a period of review, and that this would temporarily detract from the SGTO's core work. He said that the Council



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would be committed to helping the SGTO through this process to make sure it is as simple as possible.

Question from Dario: Southwark Borough Council have told us they can withdraw future funding as they have never had a contract with SGTO. While we agree that the Council can withdraw funding with proper notice etc we believe we have had contracts with the local authority. A contract can be a written or verbal agreement by one party to fulfil an obligation to another party in return for consideration. In simple terms, Southwark Borough Council funded SGTO in return for SGTO delivering on various key performance indicators. Surely this is the definition of a contract? How do Southwark Council define a contract?

Nat admitted that there is a contract in place and that money is changing hands. Nat acknowledged that the SGTO is doing more than what the service contract strictly requires. The current process will involve listing what the SGTO is doing and quantifying it, demonstrating the SGTO's value for money to anyone who questions it. This would secure the SGTO's future by showing that the Council has gone through due process. The Council is committed to supporting the SGTO's work.

Dario asked whether councillors would subject themselves to the same tendering process. Dario was concerned that the process the Council is proposing would weaken the voices of residents.

Al-issa was concerned that under a tendering process, the competing organisations would be businesses, while the SGTO is a volunteer-led organisation. Al-issa asked whether Nat could reconcile the nature of the tendering process with the reality of SGTO.

Nat stressed that the SGTO contract would not be of interest to for-profit businesses, as the SGTO's work with residents is not profit-making in nature. Nat mentioned that the true value of SGTO's services could be more than £248,000 per year, and it could actually be half a million pounds, meaning that the tendering process could safeguard SGTO by proving the high value for money that it offers.

Chris disputed Nat's interpretation, stating that the SGTO had asked for funding for two extra officers, but it was refused. Councillor Merrill claimed that the SGTO, through the quantifying process prior to tendering, could prove that it is worth more than the current Council funding it is given. Councillor Merrill said that if this were the case, the SGTO might be in a position to secure the extra staff and resources it needs. Councillor Merrill recognised that some of SGTO's work is hard to quantify, but also suggested that



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it would be more expensive for the Council to contract out this work to another organisation. He said that this in itself secures the SGTO's position.

Nat said that the SGTO is setting the benchmark for the process, but the Council still needs to fulfil its statutory obligation by going through tendering.

Question: as a charity we absolutely cannot be politically biased. Our campaigns come up through the membership and it's the membership that decide what issues we should campaign for or against no matter the political party of the current council. Why do some people within Southwark Borough Council think of SGTO as being politically biased?

Councillor Merrill assured members that he did not see the SGTO as being politically biased, although he did acknowledge that the SGTO may have opposed some Council objectives in the past. Councillor Merrill saw criticism from SGTO as being constructive and not politically motivated. But he also stated that he cannot speak for other individuals within the Council.

Kiri Pieri questions:

Question: SGTO is a federation that has been established for almost 40 years, concerned for the voice of tenants and residents in the borough of Southwark. The SGTO is doing a very crucial job for the people of this community. Why is Southwark Council working against SGTO? Kiri suggested that if the Council still did not know what the SGTO does, they would never know, regardless of the tendering process.

Councillor Merrill stressed that the Council does know what the SGTO does, even if there are aspects of SGTO's work that it might be less familiar with. The Council still needs to quantify what the SGTO does. Councillor Merrill mentioned that he had been in his current role since May, but had been a Councillor for 12 years and has lived in the borough of Southwark for his whole life. Councillor Merrill said that councillors and officers must not make assumptions about what residents want – they need to get onto the ground and ask residents for themselves.

Nat said that the Council could discover that the SGTO is doing far more than what the Council is currently aware of. Nat said that Eugene Nixon at the Council's Exchequer Service had mentioned that SGTO was the most reliable partner for the Council's Cost-of-Living Fund referral scheme. Nat listed some of SGTO's services and mentioned the value that they all offer. The Council wants to secure the SGTO's future through the tendering process.



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Chris said that it sounded as if the Council is already aware of what the SGTO is doing, so he was unsure why they needed to gather further evidence of this.

Nat stated that what the Council is proposing to do is in line with its legal procurement obligations. He said that the Council's Legal Department had given them advice on how contracts over a particular value are procured.

Althea Smith questions:

Althea mentioned that tenants had been paying a levy to fund SGTO and general resident engagement.

Question: Who in the Council is responsible for this money now, and where is it? In addition, what obligation does the Council have to take the SGTO out to tender?

Althea mentioned previously the Council had tried to divert the funding to pest control, but the SGTO successfully disputed this. Althea mentioned that the Tenants' Levy was established to prevent the need for residents to collect the funding required for resident participation themselves. In effect, residents would see a return on this money as they would see improvements on their estate and their federation, SGTO, would lobby for greater investment in Council housing.

Councillor Merrill confirmed Althea's interpretation of the use of the Tenants' Levy, but agreed to go back and research this before providing a response to Althea.

Nat confirmed the role of residents in determining how Housing Revenue Account funding is spent. He used the example of the Council's recent Get Involved Grants – residents can apply for a grant and use it as they see fit.

2. Open discussion

Melissa said that SGTO was an invaluable asset – you cannot value them in the same way you would value a heating contract. You need to see how they operate from a TRA's perspective. For example, Melissa said that as a TRA Chair, she would contact the SGTO either over the phone or email. The SGTO could give Melissa information on a particular issue that she would cascade to her committee and to her estate's residents. From one phone call, an email to hundreds of residents and various direct and indirect discussions will occur. Melissa was unsure how this kind of interaction could be quantified. Melissa said that you need to factor in the existing relationship with the TRA – something that an external provider coming in would not be able to do. The existing staff at SGTO give Melissa confidence and reassurance, and she can report this back to



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residents. Melissa stressed that the TRAs are the end users and that their experience is crucial. Melissa said that the SGTO emails she receives cover everything – she has received 20 emails from SGTO and 2 from the Council during the same period. Melissa mentioned the SGTO Office and the ability of people to come in and ask questions. She mentioned the passion and ability of the staff team. She felt empowered by SGTO and saw it as the beating heart of the Tenants Movement in Southwark.

Cris was concerned about the Council's approach to tendering, recognising that on one hand they stressed the need to open the SGTO to tender, but on the other admitting that the SGTO is the only organisation that can do the job. She asked why tendering was necessary in this situation. She asked what is stopping the Council from making a simple statement defending the SGTO's funding. The SGTO is happy to sit down with the Council and talk about service improvements, but Cris did not see the need for the tendering process.

Councillor Merrill reemphasised the role of tendering in securing the SGTO's future. Councillor Merrill mentioned that, following the quantifying process and discussions between the Council and SGTO, it is possible that the Council might come to the decision that the SGTO is 'unprocurable' and the Council could would continue funding it.

Nat mentioned that as a public authority, any decision that Southwark Council makes is subject to judicial review. Nat said that if a contract is over £60,000, it cannot go to a single supplier negotiation, it must go out to tender. The Council must be able to justify its funding decisions. Nat said that he cannot completely guarantee that SGTO would regain the contract following tendering, but he said that if the Council's decision is brought to judicial review, it must be able to defend that decision and show that the Council has gone through due diligence. While Nat thinks the SGTO would come out well from the tendering process, he said it would be remiss of the Council not to follow the advice of their own Legal Department.

Lara admitted that the SGTO is doing a lot of work, but they are underfunded and that the staff are overworking. Lara suggested that if the tendering process results in SGTO getting more funding, we should support it. Lara suggested that, for example, three people could cover Jack's role and the SGTO could provide different outreach workers for each region of the borough. Lara said the SGTO's work needs to be quantified so that the organisation gets what it needs. Using the example of the SGTO's account auditing, Lara suggested that the current volume of work is too much for one member of staff. They need more staff and this in itself would increase the SGTO's capabilities. Lara was confident that the SGTO can prove its worth using empirical evidence, and



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that it should not be scared of the tendering process. Lara was convinced that the SGTO is best placed to be the one providing the contracted service, and she had confidence in the SGTO as an independent voice for residents.

Liba suggested that putting the SGTO out to tender would be insulting, and no other organisation could provide the service better. Any alternative provider would be a pretence for greater Council control. Liba suggested that the Council needed to listen better to residents, and not to push ideas on them without their consent. She said that the SGTO is completely transparent and has given the Council multiple chances to come and talk to them about their future. She emphasised that SGTO does not cost the Council money – the money used to fund SGTO belongs to the residents as it comes from their rent.

Sam identified a difference between Councillor Merrill's statements and Nat's. Sam was concerned that Nat was not completely confident in the SGTO's ability to retain its contract following competitive tendering. Sam asked why the Council cannot use the information submitted to them from the SGTO on a quarterly basis to quantify the SGTO's work. She also asked whether a member of the Council's Legal Department had indeed approached the Council about the issue of tendering. She disputed the idea that the SGTO is on a contract, as it had been consistently funded using the Tenants' Levy for many years. Sam stressed the need for Nat to explain what has been said between Council officers and the Legal Department.

Nat clarified that the advice from the Legal Department had been given in June 2022, before Nat took over his role in September 2022. Nat recognised that the SGTO and its members are not happy about the tendering process. He offered to go back to the Legal Department and see if other alternative options might be available. Nat suggested that if alternative options are suggested, the Council could work with SGTO to pursue these. Nat emphasised that this is dependent on the advice given by the Legal Department.

Sam was concerned that this ran contrary to what Nat had previously said.

Councillor Merrill asked Nat that they meet to discuss this, but he advised the SGTO to still prepare for the tendering process as the SGTO may still need to pursue this route. Even if it uses hours as a measure, the SGTO needs to quantify what it is doing so it can prepare for the tendering process. Councillor Merrill also mentioned that councillors had approved the indicative rent, service charges and HRA budget for the next financial year. Councillor Merrill highly encouraged residents to look at these proposals and feed back to the Council.



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Al-issa declared that he is a member of the Labour Party, and he was concerned that the Council wanted to destroy the Tenant Movement that Labour had helped to create. Al-issa said that the Tenant Movement could convince others that the Party no longer supports the rights of tenants. Al-issa was also concerned that the Council still funded TRAs without putting that money out to tender – he did not see how this is different to funding the SGTO.

Lara asked how the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) was funded in Southwark.

Councillor Merrill stated that the CAB also goes through a rigorous tendering process. Nat stressed that if a contract is below £60,000, it can go through a single supplier negotiation. Legally, if the contract is over this threshold, it must go to competitive tender. Nat inherited this position when he took over his role in September. Yet Nat did reaffirm that he would ask the Legal Department if other options are available that could also safeguard SGTO's future. Nat said that the funding given to the CAB by the Council is less than £60,000 and thus it is only subject to a single supplier negotiation.

Chris mentioned that this evening's meeting was meant to demonstrate the strength of feeling behind the SGTO and to evidence its work. Chris asked members to wait to hear the outcome of Nat and the Councillor's meeting the following day. Chris reasserted the need for Nat to consult with the Legal Department. Chris said that the SGTO is always ready to have an honest conversation with the Council.

Liba said that if Nat is on the SGTO's side, he needs to go to the Legal Department and say that tendering is not an option.

Nat said that he could not dictate terms to the Legal Department but he will go to the Legal Department and ask if other options are available.

Chris emphasised that Nat would not be dictating terms, but merely expressing the views he has heard this evening. Chris said that there is likely to be a reaction from residents if the tendering process is imposed.

Sam asked that Nat explain the History of the Tenants' Levy to the Legal Department. Sam said that the Levy was established by the Tenants' Movement – it is not a traditional contract. Other organisations would not be able to compete within this framework and they could not offer the same expertise, trust and local connections as SGTO. Irrespective of this, Sam emphasised that the money used to fund SGTO is residents' money and that tendering would not be legally required in this situation.



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Nat reassured members that the History of the Levy would feature in his discussions with the Legal Department.

Al-issa asked Nat if he could continue funding the SGTO through the Tenants' Levy and the Council can tender for any extra services. This would put the SGTO on a firmer footing to bid for these additional services. Al-issa mentioned that the Council would not tender its funding to TRAs so should not tender its funding to SGTO.

After Nat left the meeting, Al-issa suggested that another meeting be convened to discuss the current funding situation. Chris agreed and thanked all those who have contributed. Chris stressed the need to wait for the outcome of Councillor Merrill and Nat's meeting on the following day. Chris said that this evening's meeting had been a success.

Agreed Actions

Action: Nat to find out what proportion of residents' service charges are given over to funding TRAs and resident involvement, and report back these figures to SGTO.

Action: Councillor Merrill to contact Althea outside of the meeting to provide a response to her question.

Action: Councillor Merrill and Nat to meet to discuss comments made at this Group Meeting.

Action: SGTO to submit a response to the HRA consultation and encourage residents to attend the consultation sessions on 11th and 12th January.

Action: Nat to approach the Council's Legal Department to discuss what alternatives to tendering might be possible.

Action: SGTO to convene a further meeting with members once further information has been gathered from Councillor Merrill, Nat and the Legal Department.



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Appendices

Appendix 1: Group Chat from Meeting

19:04:22 From SGTO - Amanda : Hi Kiri, details are on our website homepage for streetlink, <https://www.sgto.org.uk/>

19:07:27 From Susi Arnott : If John McCormack is unwell, will anyone else from LBS be speaking for Tenant&Homeowner involvement?

19:12:44 From Hajia Saidat Oketunde : Hello everyone

19:28:21 From Caroline Platt : good question!

19:28:35 From Julie phipps : Can I please read a statement from neil tasker the southwark Unite the union branch secretary

19:31:32 From Tanya / Shaun : Disingenuous

19:39:05 From Julie phipps : But tenant engagement is up to residents to get involved and not everyone has the time too or wants to

19:41:47 From Cris Claridge : So why are you making us compete with other organisations to provide this service

19:42:00 From Tanya / Shaun : The executioner would like us to oil the axe for them so they can cut off our heads more cleanly.

19:42:46 From Tanya / Shaun : This is a sham.

19:44:36 From Tanya / Shaun : This is a REPRESENTATIVE organisation not a contractor. If we don't like the direction taken by the board we can VOTE THEM OUT

19:44:54 From Julie phipps : exactly tanya

19:47:50 From Tanya / Shaun : If the Council wants a housing advice service it should fund it, not steal the tenant levy and make tenants pay for it out of our own pockets.

19:49:37 From Tanya / Shaun : Reinstate tenant council and leaseholder council. Reinstate area housing forums. That would help!



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19:52:00 From Melissa Perkins Brunswick park TRA : Can I speak from a TRA perspective who use you

19:52:26 From jennifer.juritz@dmarch.co.uk : Quite so Tanya, If the council decides to defund the organisation then the tenants rent should be reduced by the according percentage

19:52:45 From Damien : So in essence, the 'quantifying' process LBS is undertaking, is to 'list' what services the SGTO provides (at present) and future areas of interest, its processes driven examples of improvements its provided to residents already.

When this list is complete, these services can be compared with other '3rd party' 'service providers' under consideration.

In these times where we need to be very agile (Council & tenants/residents), need a SERVICE PROVIDER which can hit the ground running ... Qualified with experience and example to deliver straight away.

At the moment, SGTO has cultivated ground level groups, which work together and get things done, with some challenges to papers/directions/proposals from all sides, listening to the voices of those living under the very roof's responsible for.

19:53:04 From Tanya / Shaun : That's not the usual practice in a tender process!

19:53:24 From Susi Arnott : Who is querying the status quo?

19:54:52 From Dario (Pelican Plus TRA) : Here, here Tanya on the stealing message. Great framing

19:57:44 From Julie phipps : please allow those who have had their hands up to speak

19:57:55 From Susi Arnott : Thank you Munu

19:58:19 From Caroline Platt : would a contractor c

19:58:55 From Dario (Pelican Plus TRA) : That sounds like an argument increase our funding

19:59:03 From Dario (Pelican Plus TRA) : *to

20:00:28 From Dario (Pelican Plus TRA) : There are many people with their hand up patiently waiting



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20:00:30 From Caroline Platt : would a contractor cost more than a volunteers' organisation?

20:02:01 From Melissa Perkins Brunswick park TRA : I'd really like to ask a question /make a statement as an end user .. but hanging on so long

20:02:09 From Susi Arnott : Let not LBS become a middle-man between tenants and SGTO; they are the landlords and I believe they only started collecting the levy after SGTO had been established by tenants?

20:06:45 From Julie phipps : This is a joke how do you measure the support the sgto provides for those who need it, how do you measure every piece of advice , every piece of support they have ever given or will give

20:07:07 From margaret SGTO : Can't they get the justification of what the SGTO does from the quarterly report that they receive? Can't the Council ask the SGTO what they do without going through the tendering process? If the Council are not getting value for money why have they been funding us all this years?

20:07:52 From Sam Vacciana : That's the question Margaret

20:08:40 From Julie phipps : whose process ??? where has this come from ???

20:09:16 From Damien : Listening to local residents in our TRA, this room there appears to be 2 main worries about this process SGTO is going through (Justifying the volunteer & IRL costs), to LBS are :-

1) LBS may be looking to quieten a hard working, voice that does challenge the council.

2) A general distrust, that 'council/government' bodies, are trying to award funding to lesser effectual bodies.... (Not so much LBS, more reports of gov PPE contracts going to companies without previous, or little experience) ...

Personally I can see the logic of creating a 'tick list' of what any potential 'SGTO service provider challenger' (Quantifying what 'we' expect to be provided to us).

I guess to say 'SGTO is the best', we need to put down or manage expectations Demand and Suppliers.



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Best Analogy I can find !

- 20:09:30 From Susi Arnott : Have to go but the valid points are being made
- 20:10:12 From Tanya / Shaun : Let's be honest here, there is NO LEGAL REQUIREMENT to go through the procurement process. This is a political choice.
- 20:10:37 From Tanya / Shaun : This is fundamentally dishonest.
- 20:10:53 From Julie phipps : legal requirement really ???
- 20:11:59 From Melissa Perkins Brunswick park TRA : I've been the first
- 20:12:09 From Melissa Perkins Brunswick park TRA : Hand up ages ago
- 20:14:42 From Tanya / Shaun : After depending on TRAs and SGTO to pick up the pieces during the pandemic and social crisis, people are desperate for help and SGTO has had to step in, providing services where the council didn't. Now the reward is continuing threats to funding. Disgraceful.
- 20:17:28 From Julie phipps : yep just like the nurses and all public sector workers from claps to slaps , shame on them
- 20:17:50 From Caroline Platt : Good point Melissa
- 20:17:50 From Tanya / Shaun : That's a very good point, Julie.
- 20:17:50 From Julie phipps : exactly Melissa
- 20:19:39 From Ahmed Kabba (SGTO) : Melissa sport on!
- 20:20:00 From Damien : Agree Melissa
- 20:20:12 From Julie phipps : and how do you measure what melissa is saying
- 20:20:13 From Tanya / Shaun : This is interesting - our landlord wants us to prove that the tenants organisation represents value for money. What a joke.
- 20:20:53 From Jack - SGTO : Thank you Melissa
- 20:21:08 From Julie phipps : well said Melissa
- 20:22:10 From Jack - SGTO : SGTO is by and for residents. It is THE independent, democratic voice of Southwark Council housing residents, not a service to be contracted out.



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- 20:22:15 From Julie phipps : how is the council measured I wonder
- 20:23:25 From Cris Claridge : Thank you so much Melissa for summing up so eloquently the service SGTO provides.
- 20:24:28 From Julie phipps : can we get legal advice on this form the Southwark Law Centre?
- 20:26:15 From jennifer.juritz@dmarch.co.uk : well said Melissa
- 20:27:55 From Tanya / Shaun : Stop hiding behind colleagues in Legal Services. This is NOT A CONTRACT.
- 20:28:44 From Tanya / Shaun : There is a historic method for funding SGTO and there has NEVER been a legal challenge.
- 20:29:10 From Julie phipps : theres no dilemma here except the one you are creating
- 20:29:28 From Tanya / Shaun : I'm sick of this nonsense.
- 20:29:42 From Julie phipps : me too can't listen to no more
- 20:30:11 From Tanya / Shaun : Who is threatening a judicial review???
- 20:30:31 From Julie phipps : who indeed
- 20:30:34 From Cris Claridge : I am too Tanya. It absolutely beggars belief
- 20:31:07 From Julie phipps : its actually insulting to everyone who has been involved.
- 20:31:19 From Cllr Darren Merrill : I will have to leave at the moment but it was great to hear from everyone . But if you had a question that did not get round to please email me . Darren.Merrill@southwark.gov.uk. or i will see you at the next meeting.
- 20:31:40 From Julie phipps : involved with the sgto
- 20:31:45 From Liba Hoskin : I feel sick listening to such insincere comments
- 20:32:08 From Liba Hoskin : esp from Nat
- 20:34:03 From Caroline Platt : Lara makes a good point
- 20:34:04 From Julie phipps : but you can't quantify it that's the point



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- 20:36:41 From Tanya / Shaun : Well done Liba
- 20:36:54 From Lara Daniel, Chair-Kingswood Estate TRA : We have already quantified it. They are doing great. They deserve to be paid more. You need more staff to do your job. The workload on current staff are too much. Let us get things properly.
- 20:37:46 From Julie phipps : exactly Liba
- 20:39:52 From Lara Daniel, Chair-Kingswood Estate TRA : SGTO will definitely be fine. Put in your bid. Every work need to be costed. You have been underpaid for too long.
- 20:41:24 From Tanya / Shaun : This is a political decision not a legal decision. There is a funding process already in place. Just let it continue.
- 20:42:38 From Lara Daniel, Chair-Kingswood Estate TRA : How does it work with Citizens Advice Bureau? How do they get funded by the council?
- 20:42:54 From Tanya / Shaun : Ever feel like you've been conned?
- 20:42:54 From jennifer.juritz@dmarch.co.uk : what about the democratic option??
- 20:44:04 From Tanya / Shaun : Do not cooperate with the tendering process. It will be the beginning of the end.
- 20:44:13 From Melissa Perkins Brunswick park TRA : Tendering process is totally inappropriate for SGTO .. will totally stop them from doing their jobs for the tenants they represent
- 20:45:03 From Caroline Platt : adhering to the tendering process is taking time from the important role SGTO performs
- 20:45:21 From Julie phipps : THIS IS ALL WRONG
- 20:45:40 From Tanya / Shaun : They can only do it if we cooperate. Politically, its a big risk for them if they go through with tendering process without SGTO support, That's why they are here.
- 20:46:48 From Tanya / Shaun : Do not cooperate. Fight, fight, fight.
- 20:49:24 From Tanya / Shaun : More nonsense from Nat
- 20:49:58 From Cris Claridge : I agree Tanya.



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- 20:50:02 From Tanya / Shaun : So the method hitherto used to fund SGTO was illegal then???
- 20:50:30 From Damien : The analogy I'm getting is similar to our TRA's ...
Smaller purchases can come out of 'petty cash' ...
Larger projects go through the committee ..
- 20:51:07 From Damien : SGTO is a larger project, that a 'committee needs to agree to' .. Kind of thing.
- 20:51:40 From Tanya / Shaun : Nonsense. These rules DO NOT APPLY to the tenant levy.
- 20:52:09 From Sam Vacciana : Yeah exactly Tanya. False premise
- 20:52:32 From Tanya / Shaun : Sorry Damien, I didn't mean you were talking nonsense!
- 20:54:05 From Tanya / Shaun : Let them try to go through the procurement process without SGTO. They will cause a crisis for themselves. Like the Tories and their mini budget - self-immolation.
- 20:54:25 From Cris Claridge : Does Nat really believe what he has just said? Scary
- 20:55:22 From Tanya / Shaun : That's not how legal advice works in the Council.
- 20:55:49 From Caroline Platt : Nat should go back to the Council and tell them it is not possible to quantify the importance of SGTO
- 20:56:22 From Tanya / Shaun : I repeat___So the method hitherto used to fund SGTO was illegal then???
- 20:56:35 From Julie phipps : Exactly that Caroline
- 20:56:54 From Tanya / Shaun : Here he goes again
- 20:56:56 From Julie phipps : PLEASE ANSWER THE QUESTIONS IN THE CHAT
- 20:58:18 From Caroline Platt : It's not the Council's money - it belongs to SGTO



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20:58:33 From Melissa Perkins Brunswick park TRA : This process they propose for tendering is not fit for purpose - it's inappropriate for the services you provide . The levy point is such an important point.

20:59:36 From Tanya / Shaun : You are not our friend, Nat.

20:59:48 From Caroline Platt : I'm sorry - I will need to leave soon

21:01:12 From Tanya / Shaun : Fight back tenants, it's the only way we will save our organisation and our services. I have to go now. Tx

21:03:04 From Damien : Lets "Hope" Things don't get lost in translation, and if does, correct them.

21:03:30 From Hajia Saidat Oketunde : This is amazing and powerful messages

Well done all 👍

21:03:34 From Georgie - SGTO (she/her) : Thank you everyone

Appendix 2: Message of Support for SGTO from Theresa Adetona, Poet's Corner TRA

Good afternoon,

I am writing in support of the SGTO.

The organisation has been very supportive of our TRA and also residents. Many activities and training are offered free to residents. They also provide us valuable vital and educational information.

I can bear witness to the fact that the staff have supported me with my housing issues and also help our TRA.

Appendix 3: Message of Support for SGTO from Bryan and Lea Emery, Caroline Gardens TRA

Dear Margaret and All at the SGTO... Just saw on the app that SGTO funding from Council is on the menu for tonight's meeting with Cabinet Member for Homes and Homelessness, Councillor Darren Merrill



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Regrettably, the CGTRA has its monthly cttee mtg tonight and we cannot be with you to express the significant role the SGTO plays in our TRA life. Indeed, the SGTO is a lifeline for the Caroline Gardens TRA, a reliable and valued resource, a font of knowledge, guidance, information-sharing, care and camaraderie.

We are an OAP estate of approx 200 vulnerable older people who, through the CGTRA, rely on and benefit greatly from the SGTO's ongoing support. It means everything to us!

Keep the SGTO for all of us!

Appendix 4: Message of Support for SGTO from Katriona Beales, Unwin TRA

The SGTO was absolutely formative in helping the Unwin TRA form. Ahmed was incredibly supportive from the beginning of the process, and was the first person we spoke to who actually made it feel possible. He talked us through what was required and how to get the support of key people. The SGTO played a key role as a support mechanism and I can confidently say today that the TRA wouldn't have gotten off the ground without its support. Communications from council workers continue to be patchy at best but the SGTO is very approachable and continues to actively support us. This takes a very practical form for example, printing out hundreds of hard copies of our estate newsletter each month or so and also acting as a clear conduit of information. The SGTO's support has also been invaluable in complicated conversations with the Southwark over potential infil developments. SGTO has acted as a helpful umbrella organisation bringing together other TRAs so we can share knowledge and develop campaigns. Please continue to fund them - they are grassroots and community orientated.



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Appendix 5: Message of Support from Neil Tasker, Southwark Unite Branch Secretary

As the Southwark Council Unite Branch Secretary, I recognise the importance of giving a voice to workers; empowering them to campaign and bring about positive change as part of a democratically accountable organised Trade Union. The SGTO undoubtedly gives a similar voice to the tenants and residents of Southwark. For many years the SGTO has effectively campaigned on numerous issues important to residents and made a positive difference to the community it serves. It has a proud history of putting tenants and residents first.

Decent quality, truly affordable homes, built and maintained to a decent standard is needed now more than ever and Southwark Council and Councillors do need to objectively be held to account and not just be permitted to 'mark their own homework'. I was so pleased to watch Cris Claridge' give some more rigorous challenge at a recent Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to officers and Councillors.

To remain effective it is important that the SGTO be fully funded and maintains its independence and that the voice that it gives to the community is amplified, especially at this time of economic recession.

I understand that the SGTO is a non-political organisation. However, I would expect a Labour controlled authority, more so than others to welcome the challenge the SGTO gives, recognise the important role it has in the local community, and fund it accordingly.

Therefore, I send a message of solidarity from our Southwark Unite Branch and look forward to working with you in the near future.