



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 from Wednesday 4 December 2024 – Zoom

Staff: Margaret, Amanda, Ahmed, Eldezangela and Joshua

Attendees: 14

1. Welcome, Introductions & Apologies

Chris, the Chair of the SGTO Board, introduced the meeting, the last one of the year.

Apologies: Liz Shirley (Lordship Lane TRA); Moses Nsereko (Tabard North TRA); Colin Harrison (Paisley TRA); Carol Vincent (Thurlow Lodge TRA); Kyle Simmons (Magdalen TRA); Sharon Baah (Brunswick Park); Saidat Oketunde (ASCO – Astley Cooper)

October minutes as a true record

Proposed by Al-Issa Munu and seconded by Sylvia.

2. End of year get-together with the Mayor feedback

Andrew Eke relayed how it was a very enjoyable day and a very good event, which was well-attended, despite the gloomy weather. It featured the Mayor, multi-ward champions and chairs, members of various TRAs, a lot of food and networking, as well as people from Community Southwark, Council officials, contractors and other partners. It was an event to show our appreciation to everybody for all their hard work and to remember those lost over the past year.

Andrew further relayed how most people made a speech, including Althea Smith, Kyle Simmons, the Chair and many others. It was closed out by Carol Vincent's rendition, with Elizabeth also singing. A lot of people took part from all sides of the borough. At the end, people were calling for it to happen again next year.

Al-Issa Munu added that he found it very impressive and something we should have been doing for a long while. He had been expecting only chairs of TRAs and Council officials. He extended his gratitude to the staff, the Chair and Andrew for organising and rising to the occasion. He called for it to become an annual event and a great way to bring people together.

Chris added that it achieved its aim of being a friendly occasion for people to network and relate to and appreciate each other, rather than a place for discussion



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of contentious issues, with everyone calling for it to become an annual event. As such, it will be expanded going forward.

3. Feedback from Scrutiny (25th November) – Cris Claridge

Cris began by explaining that she only became aware of the agenda today and so apologises for a lack of preparation. She is happy to do a report on it, which SGTO can circulate. She is happy to give an overview today.

There were many recommendations made at the event, so Cris relayed the key ones. Cris thanked all the TRAs who came to the meeting and those who spoke.

Cris relayed that not many had seen a draft copy of the Resident Involvement Strategy, which the Council should have sent to every TRA rep. Cris asked for it to be sent out by SGTO, while hoping that it will be made fairly redundant, as there was lots of criticism of it. A major criticism was that it was very lengthy, unreadable and an unrealistic hope that it would go through 52,000 people's homes.

The document was based off the Council consulting with 523 residents. However, Cris stated that it was a very small part of the borough, quite random and, for many, the first-time people were consulted on anything, with the answers 'fitting into their tick boxes'.

A resident from newly re-set-up Consort TRA made very interesting observations. After falling by the wayside, Consort TRA have not had any support at all and praised SGTO for the help they have given them. The Council has not given them any assistance with their funding nor their constitution.

There was a lot of criticism of the wording of the Involvement Strategy. At the end of the scrutiny meeting, Cris thanked the committee, as she felt that for the first time the councillors listened to the residents and agreed with a lot of what was said.

Cris thinks the Council will rescind the strategy and make it more readable. Most importantly, it was recommended that there will be a working group or party – Cris suggested that it should have a clear start and finish. It will consult with tenant reps and those with knowledge of the relevant structures.

Councillors want to take the recommendations made by the recent SGTO paper and use some of them, which is very positive. For Cris, the meeting did not change the world, but she thinks 'it will be the start of getting us back in the right direction'.

The scrutiny meeting featured a lot of criticism of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Kieran Williams. For example, there were two instances given of where he had promised there will be meetings on the engagement strategy, but which had not



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occurred. Cris believes the strategy committee should take this up with Cllr Williams, who made promises in their name that were not carried out, which was very disappointing.

Cris feels that what matters most is not what the structures are, but what the outcomes of the structures are. The recent regulatory judgment on Southwark Council identified weakness in how Southwark Council takes tenants' views into account, with evidence that tenants are not leading tenant feedback frameworks, with an ineffective impact and lack of clarity on how tenants are shaping landlord services.

For Cris, TRAs are being treated by Council as if they are mainly concerned with social activities, not because the Council has statutory obligations to consult with them. The scrutiny meeting saw a big emphasis on how TRAs are here to bring communities together and 'first and foremost, to ensure tenants' rights'.

Chris clarified that the draft strategy would not be sent out until further work had been completed on it and the working group had been brought together. Althea said that the report should be given to the Tenants' Forum on the 10th December. Later, Cris asked if it made sense to see the original document, so that members could see what changes have been made.

For Andrew, even if there were good performances on the day, what needs to happen is that promises need to be committed in writing, including with regard to promised structures. He stated that every time at these forums we talk, but forget that whoever is in control of recording the proceedings is going to make it appear as if the Council are angels. He feels that it is time that we the residents draw up our own charter in writing, with SGTO reports not going to be taken front-and-centre. He believes that we need to put our ideas into a document in order to make a proposal, as we are doing the heavy lifting. Andrew wants to see what we ourselves – the volunteers – can produce, and that the Tenants' and Homeowners' Forums need to lead on this, not SGTO – this is in the document, the Council's own recommendation in 2019 that they are not using. Otherwise, it can be a tick-box exercise, and the Council can say that they have consulted. Chris replied that we will take that on board.

In response to Andrew, Cris explained that SGTO did present a paper put together by people with the right background and experience that will be used as part of the recommendations for the working group, with that being a good start, as they are tenants' recommendation.

Andrew replied that SGTO is a third external party and reiterates his belief that the Tenants' Forum need to be leading on this. For Andrew, as good as people acquitted themselves, there was nothing from those who are supposed to be leading the



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tenants' movement: if it had not been for Cris, they would have moved onto the next agenda point, with there being a lot of inexperience on the tenants' side. As such, Andrew thinks that tenants need to meet outside of the working party and deliver a document themselves.

Cris believes only SGTO can form this group, as we are represented on the Tenants' Forum and Area Forums as individuals, not as representatives of our TRAs. Cris further added that we need to build new structures, as the structures the Council have built are ridiculous and not fit for purpose. At the scrutiny meeting, Nat Stevens and the Director of Housing kept going back to the structures in the document, but the committee members said that those structures do not work: therefore, Cris thinks that we should not be backing those structures up, but arguing that they should go back to how they were before.

Munu added that he supports Andrew's point that SGTO should make a summary of exactly what happened at the meeting, to send to the Chair to distribute to the members as a true reflection of what happened, as observations may not have been accurately recorded. He also shares Cris' view that the meeting represents a glimmer of hope.

Chris responded that this creates a need for a gathering of homeowners and documents to be able to view a document, which becomes the kind of recommendation from residents and homeowners and their representatives like Cris and Althea, which they can be represented as what the residents want in the Councils' engagement strategy.

4. Motions to join SHAPE and take action against Plentific

Tanya Murat expressed disappointment that these motions were not circulated prior to the meeting with sufficient time for them to be digested. Chris suggested that the motions be voted on at next meeting.

Cris stated that the two motions are so important that people should have opportunity to really digest the content and asked for a commitment that these two items are top of the agenda for January meeting – Chris agreed that this will be done.

Action point: Motion to join SHAPE and motion regarding Plentific to be at the top of the agenda for the January Group Meeting and circulated with sufficient time before the meeting



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Emmanuel asked for Tanya to have the time to talk about the motions at this meeting, so that the motions could be digested and then be voted on at the next meeting.

Sylvia reiterated that she appreciates how much admin work SGTO do and asked for brief synopses on the topics.

Tanya expressed gratitude to those who recognised that it is important for these motions to be talked about.

Motion to take action against Plentific

Proposed by Tanya Murat

Seconded by Cris Claridge and Sylvia Raven

Tanya relayed how the Plentific issue is urgent, with Plentific due to be the way Southwark Council will be organising their repairs service. It is a new repairs platform that is like Uber, insofar that different companies make bid to take on different bits of work, including both large and small contracts for maintenance of council housing in Southwark, with Plentific paid a 10% charge, while the Council selects the contractor.

Tayna further relayed how there has been no consultations with any TRAs and hardly any consultation with trade unions, with unions in the Council not supporting it and working with Councillors who took this issue to Scrutiny Committee in November, where 10 councillors (5 Labour, 5 Lib Democrats) objected to the scheme. The contracts can add up to £25 million – it's a huge amount of money from HRAs. Tanya explained that even the Strategic Director of Resources in Southwark Council, who is akin to the finance director, noted that using Plentific is a huge risk, using language not redolent of finance directors, writing that 'there is no guarantee that Plentific will offer better value than direct award to current contractors' and that this 'could result in higher average job costs'.

Tanya believes that Plentific is an unacceptable financial risk to the Council, the HRA and TRAs, with the Council not adequately addressing the concerns of its own tenants and residents, workers and finance department. Tanya further feels that Council has not adequately consulted on something that would affect repairs, because it makes it harder to know who is doing the repairs and make it harder to hold the Council to account, all the while not saving the Council money. Tanya is not sure if it has been approved, but that even if the Council has gone ahead with it, SGTO should send an open letter to the Council opposing the introduction of



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Plentific, urging the Council to reverse its decision and asking for a proper consultation with tenants and residents and representative bodies including SGTO.

In response, Chris stated that the Council has been calling to work collaboratively with SGTO to address shared issues present in the recently released regulatory report. For example, Council asked SGTO to set up a grounds, maintenance and estate cleaning scrutiny panel, made up of 5 residents and 5 homeowners, which would hold Council to account. SGTO were told yesterday about this and it will be discussed next by the Board. Chris explained that there will be a lot more to say on it at the next Group Meeting. The Council also asked SGTO to consider setting up a customer complaints scrutiny panel. All of this came out of the recommendations from the regulatory report. Chris wants to give the Council time to see what they put together, so we can understand their plan and either work with them or fight against them.

Action point: SGTO to talk in more detail at January Group Meeting about a new grounds, maintenance and estate cleaning scrutiny panel and a new customer complaints scrutiny panel

For Steve Evans, Plentific could present issues with how work is done, as workers could keep creating new companies, keep doing the work badly and walk off with the money, with there being no accountability. He further shared Tanya's concerns regarding Plentific's 10% cut and reiterates that it is a very important issue.

Andrew explained that Plentific has already been discussed at a Cabinet meeting, such that it has already gone through the Council's bureaucratic process, with the next stage being the Council Assembly's ratification process. Andrew further mentioned that Plentific had been discussed with the unions. For Andrew, it is about the administrative process with whom the Council outsources its services to; for example, the HRA repairs budget runs out before the 2nd quarter. He is concerned more about DBS checks on anyone coming into residents' homes, with this lack of safeguarding being one of the few areas in which residents could challenge Plentific. This could be another opportunity for residents to draw up their own charter, as the repairs are not fit for service. He also wondered why no-one is talking about the fragmentation of the repairs service, which is haemorrhaging the service, as there are so many sections under 'repairs'.

Andrew further stated that SGTO should not forget who funds it and that residents should organise a proper written response, as otherwise we may keep coming back to the same methodology that does not work. Andrew has heard that Plentific may start in January, having seen the report for it, which was endorsed by the Strategic Director for Legal Services. The Cabinet panel, who raised questions, were elected



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members who had held the housing portfolio in past. Andrew restated that residents need to request safeguards in writing.

Emmanuel reiterated the importance of behaving in an orderly fashion, hearing both sides when possible, not interrupting each other and saying your piece.

Motion for SGTO to join SHAPE (Southwark Housing and Planning Emergency)

Proposed by Tanya Murat
Seconded by Cris Claridge

Tanya proceeded to explain SHAPE, a new coalition currently made up of 12 groups. It arose because campaigners against the new Aylesham Centre development and those in Peckham Vision asked for Tanya and other campaigners to come together to form a new group which had a focus on wider housing campaigning with wider housing demands, as what happening in Peckham is occurring elsewhere in the borough and country.

Despite the huge developments across the borough, including in Elephant & Castle and Canada Water, there are more people on Southwark's council housing waiting list than 20 years ago, with thousands of homeless people housed outside of the borough and young people unable to see any way to acquire an affordable and secure home of their own. SHAPE believe that the new homes set to be built by the new Government will be out of reach for those living in Southwark.

SHAPE's current supporters include Aylesham Community Action (ACA), Up the Elephant, Peckham Vision, Save Borough Triangle, Yes to Fair Development, Fight for Aylesbury, No Price on Culture, 35% Campaign, Southwark Notes, Southwark Defend Council Housing (SDCH) and Latin Elephant. SHAPE's ten demands are as follows:

1. No to overdevelopment - Is it too high or too dense? NO!
2. 50% council housing on private land. 100% council housing on council land
3. No more fake consultations. We want genuine tenant, resident and local peoples' involvement in the plans
4. Stop unsafe and poorly built development
5. Stop the demolition and sell-off of council housing - Refurbishment not demolition
6. Requisition or acquire empty homes
7. Protect and improve our estates, community facilities and town centres
8. Employ direct labour - give workers the power to challenge unsafe building work
9. Act on the Climate Emergency now. No unsustainable building, no loss of green space



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10. Stop displacement of traders for unaffordable housing

Tanya relayed how SHAPE had a successful protest on 20th November at the Council's offices, which included Zoe Garbett (the Green Party member of the London Assembly), Southwark's Unite Branch Secretary and Victor Chamberlain, the Leader of the Opposition on Southwark Council. It was hosted by ACA and SDCH. SHAPE is growing and asking TRAs to join it; it plans to do more protests and demonstrations in new year.

Tanya and Cris asked if a SHAPE representative could speak at the next Group Meeting, with Chris stating in response that the motion will be voted for in January's Group Meeting.

Tanya added that ACA is having a demonstration in Peckham at 12pm on Saturday 18th January, which SHAPE is supporting, with the next action after that a demonstration from Peckham to Borough Triangle, possibly on Saturday 1st February. For Tanya, it would be good for SGTO to have made its decision soon, as SGTO could help and build for these actions due to take place in January and February.

Following up, Emmanuel states that he expects the motion will be circulated with at least a week's notice, so that there is enough time to digest it and that a SHAPE representative could come and speak at the next Group Meeting.

5. Any other business

In response to Keri's question, Chris confirmed that the reorganisation of the residence structure will be sent out to all the SGTO representatives

Action point: send out the reorganisation of the resident structure to all the SGTO representatives

Emmanuel stated that it seems that we as a group are some way behind in receiving relevant information, with people running out of time to act on information when it is received. He gave the example that the rules just changed regarding Right to Buy and that he did not know about it until somewhat recently. He asked for information to be circulated straight away, rather than wait for a Group Meeting, so that it can be discussed first in WhatsApp chats and other channels, in order that people can grasp issues before discussing them in Group Meetings.

Chris noted what was said, further stating regarding this specific accusation that the information regarding Right to Buy has been public for a while.



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Cris supports Emmanuel's point about the circulation of information, referring to how information on the recent regulatory judgement made against Southwark Housing was given by other TRA members. Cris feels that SGTO should circulate important housing information to the membership and that she would like to be receiving pertinent information from SGTO as soon as it comes out. She believes that this is something that the Board should look at. Chris notes this.

Chris thanks everyone for their work throughout the past year and wishes everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Emmanuel also thanked everyone and gave his appreciation to Tanya for explaining the motions that she proposed.

Cris reminded everyone that sometimes we have passionate conversation because we all care and want the same things and that we all express it in different ways.

Meeting ended at 8.40pm.

Action points

4. Motions to join SHAPE and take action against Plentific

SGTO to talk in more detail at January Group Meeting about a new grounds, maintenance and estate cleaning scrutiny panel and a new customer complaints scrutiny panel

Motion to join SHAPE and motion regarding Plentific to be at the top of the agenda for the January Group Meeting and circulated with sufficient time before the meeting

5. Any other business

The reorganisation of the residence structure will be sent out to all the SGTO representatives