



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 23rd October 2024 - zoom

Staff: Margaret Onwuta, Amanda Carey, Eldezangela Gomes and Ahmed Kabba

Attendees: 21

1. Welcome, Introductions & Apologies

Althea (vice-Chair), opened the meeting, welcomed everyone and explained the agenda for the evening, where Chris (Chair) then took over.

Apologies: 4

Lordship Lane x 1 (Elizabeth Shirley), Bermondsey Street Residents Association x 1 (Brendan O'Brien), Thurlow Lodge x 1 (Carol Vincent) and Bricklayers Arms x 1 (Boz Baral).

2. Southwark Council's letter on SGTO FUNDING

Chris stated that the letter had been circulated to the membership for information purposes. Recommendations from the board had been made and a response given to the council on the 22nd Oct '24 where the deadline was 23rd Oct'24. SGTO is seeking legal counsel, and further information will be circulated once received.

3. Feedback from Scrutiny - Cris Claridge

Cris Claridge reported back on the scrutiny committee meeting attended on the 18th Sept '24, where the discussion was on 'the role of resident associations and tenant management organisations in wards'. The Chair of Scrutiny Committee was impressed by the number of TRAs in attendance.

Cris recognised the wonderful things that were happening with TRAs' in the borough.

Nat Stevens raised certain points; he stated that:

- resident engagement strategy has been drafted to ensure we engage with TRAs' in ways they want to be engaged with and every TRA in the Borough must be involved.

- admitted that officers had decided what is best for residents and gradually moved away from what Tenants are determined to do. The regulator for housing had just finished the inspection and it was commented on the number of the TRAs' that Southwark has and that the number of resources Southwark put into engaging the residents is very impressive.

Question: What is the strategy for increasing the number of TRAs?

Nat Stevens cited that there are 43 new TRAs' receiving 'getting starting grants' and that there are 123 active TRAs' in Southwark. The Chair of Scrutiny Committee noted that there are a lot of individuals doing work free of charge as volunteers and was impressed by the passion of individuals. This showed the challenges with the involvement structure, as the responsibility seems to land on the shoulders of residents.

Remuneration

Nat Stevens said that it would be impossible for the council to pay for the work that has been done as it's huge. Hakeem, we must support people, it cannot become a paid service. It is our responsibility and not the role of a volunteer, which is why we are reorganising the service. Nat Stevens said training will be outsourced to organisations like TPASS, which is part of the reorganisation strategy.

Cris then stated that the housing department have stopped talking to TRAs and quoted what Hakeem said at SGTO's group meeting, "that the number of TRAs in the borough is not important". Hakeem said that Cris took the statement out of context and what he wanted to say, was that there could be 6 or 60 TRAs', but if we are not listening to them, it's not important. Cris said she still disputes that.

Question: If officers understand the importance of TRAs, why aren't you supporting them?

Answer: Nat said he has not seen another borough that gives the same support that Southwark does. TRAs' monitor and review the service they receive being involved in state walkabouts, as an example.

Questions from scrutiny committee: How much money or work is spent signposting people to TRAs? You say you are bringing new people, but how?

Answer: Example given, that Black Parents Forum are training young people to take key roles and, we are giving 80 laptops to TRAs'.

Members of committee then argued that there was a lot of inaccuracies in the report.

One Councillor said there was a lot of inaccurate information in the report, the number of TRAs' is increasing, but the report indicates it is decreasing.

They then spoke about defunct TRA's in the area that have community facilities that are not being used.

Nat agreed, but despite this, still argued that there are 123 active TRAs'.

Question: Can we look at halls not being used and how they can be managed?'. Managing a hall is hard work and how can we help?

Nat Stevens cited Brandon 1 and 2, volunteers have more knowledge than officers.

Another councillor noted that people are receiving grants for Christmas parties etc, but there are not enough checks and balances on bank accounts.

Answer: Nat said that officers are now required to complete performance inspections and have the SGTO to support us. We need to and are monitoring TRA finance as we speak.

Question: What is the TRA core funding budget of 178k premium trying to keep 900k cover for?

Answer: It funds existing TRAs' and estates that want to form TRAs' over the past 3 years. This budget has been underspent and if a TRA has £15,000 in their account, they do not qualify.

Question: What input was there from residents in the resident engagement restructuring document?

Answer: 511 residents from 36 housing estates aged between 16 and 84, black and white, were consulted.

Consultation quoted from the report, stated that so many tenants hold the council to account, but then said that this cannot happen because they have destroyed all the structures that allow that to happen.

Cris said that the meeting was unsatisfactory and gave thanks to Ina, Bassey, and herself that they had managed to be listened to, which was a big Wishlist, and would like to believe that comments will be actioned, but in fact believes they will not. It will come back to the next scrutiny committee meeting which is on the 25th of Nov '24.

Cris contacted Sam Fosters, who is the Chair and asked how this meeting would be done?

We will be inviting representatives from the TRAs' to give their views on the committee. It was mentioned that it would be good to have one representative from SGTO and one from the Tenant Council. It's important to hear from a diverse range of voices, including people who are less involved with the structures of the Council.

Are other TRAs going to be invited?

In terms of the last scrutiny meeting, housing will circulate the draft resident engagement strategy as part of the paper for the next meeting. It will arrive at least 5 working days before the meeting, where an officer will be present at the meeting to present the papers. It has not been specified if that will be Nat Stevens.

Intention of the meeting is to hear from representatives of TRAs', to hear how well TRAs are functioning, if structures of TRAs' are working, whether the support and resources they receive are working, how they should work and if the support that they receive from the council is sufficient? They would also like feedback on the draft resident engagement strategy as it is also a chance for residents to comment on the September scrutiny meeting. It would be great if tenant representatives can attend, as it was good to see so much interest at the last meeting.

Suggestion from Cris: A list of questions can be created which Cris can share between Bassey and Ina. At the end of this process, recommendations are going to be made and maybe a group of tenants could meet before the meeting and put together some recommendations that the 3 members can then present as representatives at the Scrutiny Meeting.

Suggestion from Chris, to gather the TRA representatives for a meeting.

Chris opened the floor for people to speak about their opinions on what they have heard.

Emmanuel suggested if it was possible to get representatives from TRAs' to scrutinise reports. It is intended to decide how the committee would be set up, which Cris will represent again with a list of recommendations.

Cris stated that the housing scrutiny refuse to discuss tenant structure and should make the most out of the scrutiny. The SGTO and tenant forum representatives should raise all points, which would mean that recommendations will be proposed and increases likelihood of changes.

Munu suggested for SGTO and resident associations to prepare one report with all the recommendations.

Cris reaffirmed that they make rules for this committee, one representative is required from Tenants Forum, SGTO and a representative from a TRAs that is not involved in the council structure.

Cris Suggestion: Find out from chair how long each representative is allowed to speak.

In the East Central ward, SGTO has 14 elected members, 5 wards make up the super wards. The chair of the scrutiny committee cannot deny those people if it's asked to raise an enquiry on our behalf. Andrew would like to volunteer for any subcommittee that may be set up to make observations and give Cris the information needed.

Sam is to find out how many TRAs' are being supported by the Council.

There are TRAs' that are involved with SGTO, some are dysfunctional due to inaccessibility to have regular meetings, and these issues are having an impact on TRAs'.

We need to know what is happening with the dysfunctional TRAs' and to get them involved with SGTO, their area, and the tenant movement.

Cris highlighted that a decision needs to be made regarding who will be presenting the report as the meeting will occur on the 25th of November 2024, and suggested that SGTO should encourage representatives to attend the scrutiny committee meeting because it has an impact and shows that the TRAs' are concerned.

Chris stated that the opportunity will be utilised, and a single report created to be presented at the scrutiny committee for all points made to be taken onboard. There will be a follow up meeting, which will enable the committee to produce the counter report, and a decision made on who will present it.

The officers from the council will be at the meeting and they will be speaking of the Resident Engagement restructuring report. It was considered in the last meeting to invite representatives from the TRAs' to sit at the table and each will be given time to speak. When committee has heard all the presentations at the end of meeting, they will put together recommendations that will go to Cabinet. Therefore, SGTO needs to have a list of recommendations.

Chris stated that SGTO will be represented at the scrutiny.

4. Any Other Business

Regarding the consultation, it will not be discussed in the group meeting. Any feedback will be taken to the board as it is the responsibility of the board and not the group.

Meeting Closed 20:40 pm

DATE OF NEXT GROUP MEETING: WEDNESDAY 27TH NOVEMBER 2024

ACTIONS

2. Southwark Council's letter on SGTO FUNDING

Action: SGTO to provide feedback from Council once received

3. Feedback from Scrutiny - Cris Claridge

Action: Cris to provide feedback from November Scrutiny meeting

Action: Cris suggested for a copy of the report of reorganisation of the residence structure to be sent out to all the SGTO representatives.

Action: Who will represent SGTO at the Scrutiny Committee in November