



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 24th July 2024 - zoom

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

Attendees: 26

1. Welcome, Introductions & Apologies

The Chair, Chris, welcomed everyone and explained the format of the meeting.

Apologies : 4

Paisley x 1 (Collins Harrison), ARARA x1 (Ruth French), Thurlow Lodge x1 (Carol Vincent) and Millpond x 1 (Steve).

2. Meet and Greet Hakeem Osinaike, New Director of Housing

Chris clarified that Hakeem Osinaike was invited to the meeting to speak about his plans, programmes and the Tenant's movement. The Board of Trustees prepared 4 questions for Hakeem Osinaike to answer in the meeting.

Question 1. What will be put in place to resolve the social housing crisis in Southwark?

Answer: Southwark has been noted to have the largest stock of social housing. However, there is a high demand of social housing in comparison to supply. As a result, more new houses are being built to be advertised for bidding.

Question 2. A Green paper was conducted by the government looking at the housing assessment needs of social housing which was issued in February 2024. The outcomes have not been published but there were many factors in the green paper that would affect residents and tenants in Southwark in terms of the impact on social housing. I (resident) have noticed that there are number of houses that have been let to people from other authorities. Hence why Southwark has the longest waiting list. What has been the outcome, how will the policy be shaped and are there any news from central government?

Answer: Hakeem stated that there has been no news from Central Government and the outcomes are unknown. Southwark does not have the longest waiting list in the country. Southwark has one of the shortest waiting lists because of large stock of social housing. The demand is higher than the supply which is contributing to the delay on the waiting list. To try and meet the demands new homes are being built, working with GLA to getting grants to

build new homes and pressurizing central government to ensure Southwark is meeting the housing needs.

Question 3. What are the current stages of the projects occurring in Bell Gardens and when will the project be most likely completed?

Answer: Hakeem stated that Southwark council is committed in building a housing Scheme for Bells Gardens consisting of 2 stages of contract. First stage has been completed. However, the economic situation has affected the process, making it unaffordable to proceed. Assistance is required from GLA to complete the schemes and a case has been made. Currently, waiting on Labour government as they want to prioritize housing. A change in economic situation may likely reduce interests' rates increasing the probability of money being borrowed to complete the schemes. Cannot confirm whether Bells Garden Schemes will restart and when that will happen.

Question 4. What are your plans regarding the Tenant's movement?

Answer: Hakeem stated that Tenants should be involved in all aspects of the process including services provided, how the services are designed, delivered and decision made. A reorganisation of the engagement service is being conducted and a new engagement strategy has been written which will go out for consultation. A residency repair improvement board has been set which has shown to be going well as changes are being done gradually. There are plans to set up a similar board for Tenancy to be chaired by a resident. Resident engagement is now a regulatory requirement. Inspections from the regulators of social housing are assessing the involvement of residents in the decisions making.

Question 4a. What are your plans regarding the funding for SGTO?

Answer: Hakeem stated that funding is available but there needs to be a discussion with tenants on how the funding will be utilised. There are Government processes that officers are required to follow by law. SGTO funding should be focused in empowering the residents to be accountable for design and delivery of services. The procurement framework is being followed by the council.

Action: SGTO will be invited to submit their expression of interest in the procurement process which will be evaluated leading to a decision being made in August and a contract in place by September.

Question 4b. What form of structure will be emplaced to make sure that you are consulting with the residents and ensuring strategy of engagement is meaningful?

Answer: Hakeem stated that having an engagement consultation approach strategy seems to be more effective.

Procurement and Engagement strategy

Resident stated that it is concerning as the government is never willing to share power with the people, they claim to work for but are willing to control. It was reinforced that the approach taken seems not to be through consultation but by informing the residents.

Answer: Hakeem stated that SGTO receiving money automatically does not make it right and it is the responsibility of the officers to follow the process. The objective is to continue to provide advisory service and there is no reason why SGTO could not win the procurement due to the passion of the organisation, being the body of tenants and willingness to give good services. Residents have been involved on how the engagement strategy should look like which will go out for public consultation. The engagement strategy has been sent to the Tenant Participation Advisory body which gave good feedback on the strategy.

Resident stated that tenant wants to have more power and control over the way the landlords' services are designed and hold them accountable.

Action: Suggestion made by Chris: Have meeting (one agenda item) with the committee on how the framework was put together.

Question 5. Leaseholders and tenant service charge being overcharged, and leaseholder statement is never accurate as people are paying towards things that do not exist.

Suggestion: Needs to be a cultural shift change within Southwark Council (on how officers deal and communicate with tenants). **Suggestion:** Officers needs to check within areas that the list of things in the leaseholder statement are being conducted.

Answer: Hakeem agrees regarding the inappropriate culture of officers towards tenants. Hakeem also agreed on the leaseholder's issue but highlighted that there are people that are undercharged. Both issues are being addressed.

Community engagement

Resident stated that Southwark used to have more TRAs before because of strong engagement since there were area forums. Resident stated that it is sometimes difficult to deal with the engagement officers.

Answer: Hakeem stated that the number of TRAs that exist is not important for him. The important thing for Hakeem is that tenants are engaged. There are other ways that tenants can be engaged for instance zoom in which a lot more people can participate. The methods used for engagement needs to be explored to ensure that maximum numbers of tenants remain engaged. TRAs will continue to be supported since there are people that prefer to be engaged through TRAs. However other residents outside the TRAs also need to be engaged.

Levy

Resident stated that Tenants made contributions to the Levy which was included in the resident's rent payment to finance the funding of SGTO. However, it is being proposed for SGTO to be in partnership with the council when the organisation was set up by the tenants to be an independent tenant body.

Answer: Hakeem stated that there is no proposal for SGTO to be the arms of the council.

Question 6. How can it be ensured that money will not be blocked if an action is done by SGTO that Southwark council does not agree with?

Answer: Hakeem stated that there is a procurement process ensuring that a bias does not happen.

Chris stated that SGTO was set up to be a voice of the residents to campaign against issues. But going by the rules of the council due to procurement takes away SGTO being an

independent body, dismantling the authority of SGTO. Hakeem stated that SGTO will still be an independent body which doesn't have to do what the council wants. Nat Stevens stated that the procurement aim is to measure the number of interventions that SGTO is doing to fulfil the needs of the residents.

Chris stated the performance indicators markers are given to the council every quarter meaning that the council has been marking SGTO. The resident requested Hakeem to give the resident their Tenant Movement back. Hakeem state that cabinet decision highlights that the money utilised to advise residents cannot automatically be given to SGTO and the market needs to be tested for it. Hakeem suggested that SGTO can gain alternative funding elsewhere if SGTO wants to be totally independent of the council. Hakeem also stated that the strategy is going out for 12 weeks for consultation giving everyone the opportunity to give their comments.

3. Minutes of Group Meeting held on 24th April and Matters Arising

The Minutes were not discussed in meeting due to timing and discussion taking place.

Action: Meeting minutes held on the 24th of April needs to be agreed in the next group meeting.

4. Plans for SGTO Conference in October 2024

Action: "Future of social housing" is the theme of the conference.

5. Updates on TRA's Chairs/Secs Meet & Greet

Action: The Meet and Greet is on hold until after AGM in September. More details will be available once confirmed.

6. Invitation to the upcoming AGM on 26th September 2024

Action: Invitation will be sent out for people to nominate themselves or others to run for the positions of Trustees in SGTO.

7. Any Other Business

SGTO Hustings update and appreciation -Chris stated that the Husting was wonderful, and many people attended the event.

Meeting Closed 21:06 pm

DATE OF NEXT GROUP MEETING:

ACTIONS

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Any other business

Action: Residents rights seem to be manipulated by the council. Therefore, resident is willing to join community champion to make contributions on the rights of residents.