The housing repairs line will remain free after a successful campaign by residents persuaded the Council to reverse its decision to bring in a paid number.

The Council had initially decided to phase out the free 0800 number and bring in an 0300 number as a way of saving £65,000 per year and to encourage more people to report repairs online.

However, many residents felt that this was unfair and that this would mean Southwark’s most vulnerable citizens would be unable to report repairs due to high costs and not having access to a computer.

Any callers using pay-as-you go phones would be especially hit and would be faced with costs of up to 50p a minute to call the line.

The SGTO organised a petition protesting the change, which gained almost 650 signatures from residents and TRAs across the borough, as well as picking up coverage in the local press. Even the Mayor of Southwark signed the petition…

This petition was delivered to the Council’s September Cabinet Meeting, where SGTO Chair Cris Claridge gave a short speech to support the campaign. Councillor Fiona Colley, Cabinet Member for Finance said that the SGTO had presented ‘a really eloquent and well reasoned case’ and agreed that there was a real risk that vulnerable residents would be left behind.

Cllr Colley proposed that the Council keep the repairs line free, and the motion was agreed unanimously by the rest of the cabinet. The SGTO is very happy that the campaign was successful – even if it should never have been necessary in the first place!

We want to thank everybody who supported the campaign and signed the petition. The SGTO will continue to fight for tenants’ rights but cannot do so unless people get involved! If you do want to help out please contact the office at info@sgto.co.uk or by calling 0207 639 6718.
Housing came top of the agenda at the political party conferences this September, as politicians of all stripes sought to address the long term crisis in housing need across the country.

Image: Daily Express

The Conservatives sought to unveil a ‘rebirth’ in Council housing through providing additional funding and giving councils the powers to secure land for housebuilding. Theresa May’s conference speech announced an extra £2bn fund for councils and housing associations to bid for, with the Prime Minister saying that she would ‘dedicate’ her premiership to tackling housing.

Critics however were soon to point out that the money would only amount to 5,000 new affordable homes per year, far, far below the amount needed to meet the needs of the estimated 1.2 million people on waiting lists across the country. The announcement also came on the heels of that of a further £10bn investment in help to buy schemes, which many have pointed out as only benefitting the well off and actually serving to increase house prices further.

However, the Conservative’s announcement to fund any social housing whatsoever signals a major shift in approach – even if it is just a rhetorical one. This would be the first direct investment into social rented housing since 2010.

Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour also had a lot to say about housing. His conference speech largely reiterated what the party had put in its 2017 manifesto, namely a commitment to deliver 100 thousand new affordable homes a year if in power. He argued that the Grenfell Tower tragedy stood as a ‘tragic monument’ to a system with nothing but ‘contempt for working class communities’.

Corbyn’s words on estate regeneration however were less expected. He promised that Labour policy on regeneration would only allow schemes to go ahead if they benefitted existing communities, with legally enforceable rights to return for tenants and the need for ballots before any works took place.

This potentially puts the Labour leader at odds with Labour councils such as Southwark, where controversial estate regeneration and demolition schemes have been resisted bitterly by local residents and campaigners. However, the party said soon after that this policy would not cover regeneration schemes that were already going ahead.

It is also to be seen whether or not this will affect the Labour Mayor, Sadiq Khan’s ‘Estate Regeneration Guidance’, where an earlier draft was opposed to the use of ballots. Southwark Labour put out a press release in response to Corbyn’s announcement, defending the Aylesbury regeneration scheme. There has been no mention of the Heygate regeneration, where around 1000 council homes were lost.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS:
HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE
Wednesday 29th November, 6-8pm at Bells Gardens SE15 6UJ

The SGTO has teamed up with legal experts from the Southwark Law Centre and Anthony Gold Solicitors to deliver workshops for TRAs and residents to empower themselves with a basic understanding of the law around repairs and maintenance.

The workshop will cover what to do when repairs aren’t done, or aren’t done properly, and what you can do if you need help or need to take things further. Depending on demand for this initial workshop, we will look at rolling it out to different TRAs across the borough in future.

The course is completely free but spaces are limited – please contact the SGTO at info@sgto.co.uk or by calling 0207 639 6718 to book your place.

SGTO
Company Reg: 6406353
Charity Reg: 1130043
office is accessible for support & advice from 10am -5pm Mon -Fri
Please feel free to call us on 020 7639 6718
The Mayor consults on the London Housing Strategy

On 4th and 13th October 2017, representatives from London's housing sector attended consultations at City Hall to discuss ten key areas of the Mayor's Housing Strategy. Included in the attendees were housing associations, councils, building companies, housing charities, and community groups. One of the SGTO's Board Members, John Tyson, was there, and reported back his impressions of what was being said.

"As we all know, there is an enormous housing crisis in the UK, noticeable in part because of the stark increase in homelessness, and we in Southwark are facing it as much as anywhere else. I wanted to hear not only what the Mayor's office was planning for London, but also the concerns across the industry, to better understand how people are trying to fix the problem.

Of the ten available topics, I was allocated to sit on:
- Improving the skills, capacity and building methods of the industry
- Diversifying the home building industry

Well designed, safe, good quality, and environmentally sustainable homes

Elsewhere, people were discussing how to bring more land to market, meeting diverse residential needs, fairer deals for renters and leaseholders, affordability, and homelessness.

There are a number of distinct contradictions at the heart of the strategy - build homes quickly but of better quality; develop a skilled workforce but creating a factory-like approach of modular prefabrication; encourage profit seekers to think of social need - all of which will need to be addressed if it is to be truly successful. One key fact that came out of the Deputy Mayor's closing speech was that currently only 8% of Londoners could afford 80% of the homes currently being built.

Others in the sector were concerned about the impact of Brexit on the available workforce, which is already decreasing due to older workers not being replaced by younger ones. Government restrictions on funding, and a lack of appetite to finance smaller developers were also said to be having a negative impact on capacity. Grenfell and Ledbury were both mentioned in relation to how independent reviews of works have not nearly come up to the mark in the last decade. But overall there seemed a relief that politicians are finally waking up to the need to fix these and other problems.

I left the event feeling reassured by City Hall staff, that things are changing and moving in the right direction, that the days of swift estate demolition and developers getting away withwelching on deals are over. But quickly I remembered that good intentions have been at the heart of the failure to fix the housing crisis - good people saying good things, but ultimately ideals being swept aside to get homes built at any cost, with murky beneficiaries. Look at Haringey's ongoing dispute, or the case over Aylesbury. Local activists are still spending a lot of time, effort, and money fighting situations they deem not to be in the best interest of their communities.

In nearby Lewisham, RUUS (www.theruss.org) are creating an innovate approach to community-led housing. It's an example we in Southwark might like to take note of, and one I raised at the consultation.

Elsewhere at the meeting, some talked about a grand vision for London, creating a meaningful, planned city, moving away from the ad hoc nature of planning applications. It's a nice idea, but if Christopher Wren couldn't manage it after The Great Fire of London in 1666, there's little hope for it 350 years later."

You can still add to the consultation yourself, up to 30th November 2017, here:
https://www.london.gov.uk/talk-london/housing/london-housing-strategy-consultation.
Updates on Ledbury Estate

The new district heating system works are well underway with heating and permanent hot water expected to all flats by the end of October.

There was a small fire on Sunday 8th October in the afternoon at Skenfrith house. London Fire Brigade forced entry to a flat where the resident had gone out leaving a pan on the stove, it was quickly extinguished, the block was temporarily evacuated but thankfully no one was hurt and there was no damage.

Some residents are still frustrated by the time taken to bid for moves through the council's Homesearch system, as well as the lack of council rent properties available.

Some residents are in temporary accommodation (B&B hotels) some have requested self contained units with kitchen facilities but have been told there are none available within the borough.

The ARUP engineers report is due on 20th November and will give some further information on the structural issues of the blocks and indication of the scale of the major works required moving forwards.

A Resident Project Board panel has been set up alongside the Independent Tenant and Leaseholder Advisor and will hold their first meeting this week and continue meeting regularly to have input into the works taking place on the estate in conjunction with Southwark Council and the contractors.

The leaseholders held a meeting last week with the council and were told that they would soon receive information on a package that Southwark is working up for those interested in selling back to the council.

As well as information on compensation.

Many residents have taken up compensation claims via Anthony Gold solicitors in relation to historical disrepair matters as well as the distress of recent events.

Ledbury Action Group have created a resolution, which has been passed by several unions (Unite Community and Unite Housing) as well as two Labour Ward branches (Camberwell and Brunswick Park). Copy of the Motion available upon request.

WHAT IS HAPPENING ON YOUR ESTATE? LET US HEAR!!!

Over the past fifteen months, Bells Gardens Tenants and Residents Association has been working to get locked doors placed on Edwin House. Edwin House is the only block on the estate that does not have security doors. As a result, the block has frequent problems with trespassing, rough sleepers, vandalism, substance misuse, prostitution, and other forms of anti-social behaviour. The TRA started a petition and collected over forty (40) signatures, which represents a high level of support within Edwin House specifically. The petition was brought to the Peckham and Nunhead council meeting as part of a deputation on 15 November 2016. The three Peckham Ward Councillors (Councillors Hargrove, Situ, and Soanes) confirmed the seriousness of the anti-social problem within Edwin House to the rest of the councillors. The Community Council noted the deputation and suggested for Edwin House to be considered for inclusion in the entry door programme in 2019-2020. Bells Gardens TRA continues to work with the Ward Councillors to bring the inclusion forward.

Bells Gardens TRA also has an ongoing dispute with Keepmoat, the contractors that underwent major works throughout the estate in the summer of 2015. During the works, Keepmoat built a fenced-in ‘temporary’ road through an area of green space in the middle of the estate. Since they finished the works, they are refusing to remove the road and repair the land, despite it not being used or maintained. Subsequently, a number of foxes and rats have created burrows within the fenced area, which contributes to the ongoing pest problems within the estate, as well as causes noise, safety, hygiene, and other nuisance concerns. The Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations has agreed to help monitor this situation alongside the Bells Gardens TRA and offer help in the ongoing campaign to remove the road and replace the green space.
Another year has rolled around. This year’s AGM took place on Wednesday 27th September here at Bells Gardens Community Centre. Over 60 members were in attendance to witness the appointment of new trustees to serve on the SGTO Board.

Last year’s AGM was exceptional, in that we had more nominees than we had places for. This gave birth to a change in our method of voting from show of hands to voting by ballot, which many people appreciated.

The election process this year was facilitated by Mr Gordon McCullough, Chief Executive from Community Southwark which is an umbrella body for voluntary organisations across Southwark. He explained that there could be between 7 and 16 members on the board as laid down in the Memorandum and Articles, and that we had received 15 nominations.

Gordon proposed that, due to numbers, there would not be an election process using the keypads. Instead, each nominee could stand and say why they wanted to become a trustee and would be proposed and seconded as a group. However, if anyone had any objections to any individual, this could be voted independently.

Following a suggestion from a member, it was agreed that everyone had already had the opportunity to read the statements provided by the nominees and therefore, they were all asked to stand and introduce themselves only, in order to put a face to the name.

Gordon requested by show of hands any objections to any of the 15 nominees becoming a board member. There were no objections, so Gordon declared that all 15 nominees were successful in becoming the new trustees to the board of SGTO.

Last year the trustees worked tirelessly in sustaining their obligations, with six brand new additional members on the board we are confident they will do even greater works.

If you are interested in being part of this great experience next year, you are welcome to attend board meetings as an observer. You can contact the office on the details below for more information.

We are all that we need and we are better together. The SGTO encourage everyone in Southwark to get involved with the work of SGTO, because you are the reason we exist. We especially want to hear how best we can serve you.

Local residents got together in October to enjoy tea, cakes and sandwiches and find out about the free courses on offer at the Bells Gardens Community Centre and other opportunities to get online in Southwark.

Staff from Age UK, South London Cares, ThamesReach, the London Institute of Banking and Finance and Southwark Council mingled with tenants and residents, whilst providers were on hand to give live demonstrations of the online courses available at the SGTO.

Digital exclusion remains a major issue in Southwark, with an estimated 35,000 in the borough people never having been online. The benefits of getting online include saving money and staying in contact with family and friends, but the costs of being digitally excluded can mean difficulty in accessing services, and missing out on the best deals.

This is why the SGTO is so keen to work with other local partners to help more people get online.

New courses at the SGTO include ‘Lessons in Financial Education’, a free accredited programme to help people manage their finances and online banking and security training offered through ‘Learn My Way’, in partnership with Lloyds Bank.

SGTO Digital Tea Party
Southwark Tenants
Conference 2017
SATURDAY 18th NOVEMBER
9AM - 5PM AT SALVATION ARMY COLLEGE
CHAMPION PARK
CAMBERWELL, LONDON SE5 8BQ

SOCIAL HOUSING
Safe Now & In The Future

£2 BILLION FUND FOR SOCIAL HOUSING
POWER TO SECURE LAND FOR HOUSEBUILDING
REGNERATION - BALLOTS RIGHT TO RETURN
100,000 NEW HOMES EACH YEAR

Guest Speaker Loretta Lees
Is a Professor of Human Geography at the University of Leicester. She lives in London and has long been working with London Council Estate residents to fight the gentrification of council estate

Question Time
Workshops
Market Place

The best way to predict the future is to create it

SGTO
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Charity Reg: 1130043

office is accessible for support & advice from 10am -5pm Mon -Fri
Please feel free to call us on 020 7639 6718
The SGTO aim to develop grassroots football in the London Borough of Southwark, giving young people the opportunity to participate freely and ultimately upskill their football talent.

The aim of the tournament is to engage and encourage young people to learn more about Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs) and how they can get involved and work with their TRA.

Involving young people in decision making on estates can help tackle antisocial behaviour, gang and knife crime, postcode boundaries and improve cohesion. TRAs within the same proximity can come together and form a team. This can be done by organising a meeting with young people in the area. The SGTO can support setting up such a meeting if required.

Last year’s competition attracted sixteen teams with over one hundred and seventy young people with their cheering parents. The winners for 2016 were Conant and Rutley and Brimptonroy TRA.

The 2017 football competition kicked off at Brimmington Park on the 26th August. The event attracted families with crowds of young people all dying to get hold of the trophy. There were Tenants and Residents Associations and non TRA teams from across the borough.

The day long event was witnessed by the chair, Cris Claridge, and vice chair, Chris Meregini, of SGTO from group stage through to the elimination round, to the quarter and semi-finals and then the final.

The two finalists were Brimptonroy FC and Rockingham TRA. The eventual winner was the first time entrants to the competition, Rockingham FC who won by 2 goals to 0 in their favour of clinching the magnificent trophy.

The Lordship Mayor of Southwark Councillor Charlie Smith was guest of honour, he presented the best player award to 7 year old Jayden Atta Yaboah of the Mighty Royal, and the goal keeper of the tournament and the winner’s trophy was handed to the Rockingham captain.

Tips on setting up a young football team:

Identify one or more young people on your estate to set up a team. Create an incentive, such as providing food after every training session, designate a committee member to liaise with the lead young person, the team representative will report back to the T&RA regularly.
HOurBank

HOurBank is one of your local timebanks in Southwark. For nearly 20 years we have been helping people from Southwark use their skills to help each other. People can bank their time and then get help in return.

This could be anything from shopping for a neighbour, mending a sock, baking a cake or learning how to Skype. It is very flexible, members can exchange skills with others whenever they have time.

A member said that HOurBank is “a network of local, reliable friends with whom we can exchange skills, chat and learn from.”

See the HOurBank webpage on www.pecan.org.uk to find out how to join, and where to meet us at our free drop-in cafés around the borough. Or pop in to Pecan on Peckham High street next to the Post Office or ring 020 7732 0007

GET DIGITALLY INCLUDED

We are offering the opportunity to stay in control of your

- Mobile Banking,
- Budgeting your money
- And keeping your money safe online

The following financial courses are free

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Opening Time: Monday to Friday – 10am – 4pm
SGTO Address: – 19 Buller Close, Bells Gardens Community Centre, Peckham, London, SE15 6UJ
Tel: 020 7639 6718, Email: info@sgto.co.uk
Website: www.sgto.org.uk
Volunteers Needed: – Please contact the office on the number above for further information

SGTO
Company Reg: 6406353
Charity Reg: 1130043
office is accessible for support & advice from 10am -5pm Mon -Fri
Please feel free to call us on 020 7639 6718