



Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations

Bells Gardens Community Centre,
19 Buller Close, London,

Campaigning for Housing Rights and Council Homes

SE15 6UJ

Minutes of SGTO Group Meeting

Held on Wednesday 23rd February 2022,

Venue- Online ZOOM

Present: 26 attendees

Staff: Margaret Onwuta, Amanda Carey, Ahmed Kabba, Silvia Rahim, Rita Edmond, Jack Lewis

1. Welcome and introductions:

Cris Claridge welcomed everyone and informed the group about the passing of Sheila Hayman, who was one of SGTO's long standing members and a minute silence was observed.

Apologies

Chris Meregini, Chinelo Njaka, Christiana Metibumu

2. The main business of the meeting was repairs. Cris welcomed and introduced the guest speakers Christine Bramman (Head of Repairs and Maintenance), Simon Holmes (Head of Engineering), Claudia Firth (Radical Housing Network member) and Jordan Creed (Social Action Officer for Community Southwark). They all introduced themselves and informed the group what their job entails.

- 2.1. Claudia was the first speaker (a Southwark resident as well and lives in a Housing Co-op in the north of borough and have been actively involved in the Management Committee. She explained what the Radical Housing Network is all about.

How Climate Crisis and Housing Crisis intersect

- The climate crisis poses a challenge: should we still support new house building at all?
- The climate crisis and housing crisis are often pitted as incompatible – that we cannot do both, but it is vital that we think about them together
- Construction already accounts for 10% of our greenhouse gas emissions.
- Every new development pours 1000's of tons of CO2 into the atmosphere.
- Projects measure emissions over 50 years and often do not include demolition etc.
- Often build on green spaces, cut down mature trees (mature absorb CO2, saplings emit).
- And rely on myths of net zero and carbon off-setting.
- There are also shared issues such as insulation and energy usage.
- We do not have 50 years, so we need to think about how we house our communities during the crisis – not about how we make profit.



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The People's Housing Charter

- Developed through online workshops drawing together campaigners on climate and housing issues. Now supported by over 100 prominent academics, individual supporters, and organisations.
- It calls on local and national government to adopt these principles:
- Housing is a right for all. Everyone should have a home that is affordable and in good repair.
- Housing must not contribute to the destruction of the environment.

To achieve these seven principles:

- 1. Convert long-term vacant properties to social housing
- 2. Refurbish and repurpose – rather than demolish existing buildings
- 3. Build using sustainable materials that are truly carbon neutral
- 4. Introduce and enforce rent controls and secure tenancies
- 5. Tax the value of private land to fund public investment
- 6. Retrofit all buildings to the highest environmental & safety standards
- 7. Introduce participatory democracy in all planning processes

How the Charter is being used

- Challenging the 'incompatibility' of the two issues
- Emphasising the necessity of thinking about them together
- Encouraging campaigns and organisations to adopt it and consider their priorities in light of the issues – it can open up new questions
- Getting more people and organisations to sign up to support it
- Building towards the local elections in May
- Collaborating and joining up struggles e.g. RHN working with Insulate Britain and Fuel Poverty Action

Action: Jack to organise a campaign meeting

- 2.2. Jordan Creed spoke next about his role Social Action Community Officer at Community Southwark: his role is to support local residents, groups, or anything that they would like to cover or do any campaigns. He also helps residents write letters to send to local councillors to advocate for any pressing issues they are facing. They also have a crafts workshop due to start from April this year, from 11am to 1.30pm. He explained how participants make arts and crafts e.g., coasters, fridge magnets, banners or anything with a message for somebody they want to influence for the change they want to see. He encouraged people to book on Eventbrite to attend the sessions. Cris thanked Jordan for attending and told him that maybe both SGTO and Community Southwark could investigate teaming up on some areas that overlaps in what both groups do.

Action: Jordan and Jack to arrange a meeting to discuss the possibilities of joining up to carry out some much-needed campaigns across the borough.



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2.3. The Housing Repairs and Maintenance Services

Christine (Head of Engineering) covers lots of areas in her department such as building services, technical officers, surveyors, disrepairs team, handy persons services, empty homes initiatives, housing adaption for disable and private sector properties through grants and loans but the reason she was invited to speak to the group is to give us a better understanding of the delivering of repairs and how its handle internally as there seems to be some lack of communication between the council, contractors and tenants. Christine mentioned that going forward, they are looking into having repairs call centre integrated in the main call centre and have a priority line to just discuss repairs. Cris spoke about how the old Area Forums use to operate the over years and how structured it used to be and all council officers involved in such matters will attend and give updates where necessary. There were questions regarding working not being carried out properly but signed off and also incidents where contractors don't turn up for repair jobs but contact the council to inform them that there was one in to give them access. Christine will look into such matter and said there is a robust measure in place to dealing with such incidents and there is now also a team that's responsible for leaks and damp which has always been a problem for residents. Members were encouraged to report any leakages and damp. Christine said one of her colleagues Keith, should be invited to speak about these issues. Also repairs core group was one way where people's voices are heard, and those meetings were very successful because all the right people were present and there were suggestions that the forum is resurrected.

Action: Christine to looking into various concerns being raised and feedback to SGTO. Will also arrange for Keith to attend one of our meetings.

Simon Holmes - Head of engineering, deals with matters such as, mechanical, electrical, fire safety and asbestos and he asked the group the raise any concerns around the heating repairs or experiences they've had with an individual boiler within their property or if they are part of a community or district heating system and he would like to know what kind of services they are getting from the Council. There were questions asked about people being overcharge in their energy bills: contractors being sent to carryout multi-skills jobs and residents are not happy with that as they prefer skilled workers to right jobs they are trained to do: Simon dealt with some of the concerns people had especially on issues of elderly people not having adequate heating in their homes. He explained about the heat metring legislation brought in by the government which is to ensure people have efficient energy installed in their properties and can only pay for what they use. There will be a meeting to explain how all this will work but on the other hand people who are affected with issues may not be able to attend because the meetings are only on teams or zoom. **Action: Simon and Christine to liaise on this matter and feedback to SGTO**

3. Minutes of Group Meeting held on 26th January and matters arising

The minutes held on 26th January 2022 were agreed as a true record of the meeting.
Proposed by Beverly Graham and seconded by Jennifer Newton.



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4. Matters arising:

Questionnaire to survey residents on their views of Area Forums.

First meeting to discuss this matter is set for Monday 28th February at 6pm.

1. Formation of Campaigns Action Committee
Covered in item 6.
2. Assessment of our capacity to conduct hybrid meetings.
Survey was conducted and staff team will look at the logistics and report back.
3. Distribute posters re: Councils Energy Support Scheme
Margaret reported that though we don't have the capacity to do the mailing list, flyers were sent to TRAs to distribute with other materials they send out to their communities. Margaret also informed the group that the Council confirmed that we are the most referred team and so far, 139 applications processed and 80% of that was successful and have received payment.
4. Report on Poll survey conducted.
Jack said that following a meeting of the Campaigns Committee where only five members attended, there was a need for a change of approach, as he was concerned about this low level of attendance. He is working with Angharad Davies (Chair, Clifton Estate TRA) to create a survey asking members for their views on what we should campaign on. From this, the objectives of a Campaign Group can be set at an open meeting where all members will be invited. Jack emphasised that the SGTO's campaigning work must be decided by the membership, and as such, he encouraged members to take part in, and promote, the survey.

5. Co-option of members to the SGTO Board

Cris was delighted to announce the co-option of two board members from Ledbury TRA: they are Hanan Marjdi and Daniel Gregory and have been interviewed by the board. The next stage is arranging for training on the responsibilities of being a board member. Cris will contact Stephanie Linham who is the trainer and also this might be open to other members. **Action: Cris to contact trainer.**

6 Any Other Business

Meeting ended at 9.10pm

Date of next meeting: 23rd March 2022