



# Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations

*Bells Gardens Community Centre  
19 Buller Close, London  
SE15 6UJ*

**Campaigning for Housing Rights and Council Homes**

## **Group Meeting Minutes Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2022, 7.00pm – 9.00pm Face to Face and Zoom**

**Attendance:** 21

**Staff:** Amanda Carey(face2face), Rita Edmond(zoom), Jack Lewis(face2face), Ahmed Kabba(zoom)

### **1. Welcome, Introductions & Apologies**

Cris Claridge (Chair) welcomed Darren and everyone to the meeting, and was informed that no one had chosen to attend the centre in person, apart from Darren Merrill and his colleague Karen Shaw.

Cris offered her sincere gratitude for Darren attending this difficult question and answer session and for the hard work he had done in preparing his answers, which will be shared with membership.

Apologies: No apologies

### **2. Conversation with Cllr Darren Merrill, Cabinet Member for Council Homes & Homelessness**

Darren announced that Karen Shaw had joined him to assist with session, Head of Housing Solutions.

1. *Hard working citizens have been let down, especially taxpayers. Many do not earn enough to buy a flat though they are working full time. The bidding system is unfair. Many are living in poor housing and overcrowded conditions. And many have been bidding for 8 - 10 years. Is there any hope at all?*

The fundamental challenge is the expensive property market in London. Southwark has the largest council housing stock in London and one of the biggest new build programmes nationally. This places the borough in one of the best positions to respond to housing need because of the proactive work being done to increase the council housing stock. Despite this, the number of social homes available for allocation has reduced significantly year on year as we see less movement out of the social housing stock into other sectors such as home ownership. Demand for available social housing supply has also increased over that time, meaning there is not enough housing to go round and that waiting times overall have increased.

Because of this mismatch between supply and demand we need a system for deciding who we prioritise and how. We do this through our allocations policy which fundamentally prioritises people via a combination of highest assessed need and waiting time. It is the reality that there is not enough social housing available for everyone that wants it. For some whose needs are assessed as lower, or who do not qualify to join the housing register, to be honest they will be

unlikely to get social housing however long they wait with the current level of housing we have. That is way as an administration we are prioritising our council direct delivery program. In the meantime whilst these are being built our commitment is to assist those residents with advice about other available options and ways to improve their housing circumstances.

## 2. What is the government doing about the housing crisis and taking care of accommodation?

The Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has a specialist team that work with boroughs around their activity to prevent homelessness and respond to housing need (HAST – Housing Advice Support Team). They review the monitoring information the council provides quarterly and provide comment and challenge. Periodically they visit the council to look at the way our services operate.

They provide funding to help authorities prevent homelessness. These funds represent a contribution to the significant expenditure the council commits to prevent homelessness, deliver housing advice and homelessness services and provide temporary accommodation.

The government provides some funding for new affordable housing development through its settlements with the GLA, who allocate these resources to provide part of the funding for new build programmes. Government funding no longer constitutes all or even the majority of the funding for building a new council or housing association home. The full cost has to be funded through the addition of council borrowing and use of right to buy receipts.

The Government has a number of strategies and plans in this area. As an example they set a target to end rough sleeping by 2024 – this was one of the Conservative Parties manifesto commitments. To help realise this target they work closely with local government and the third sector in this area and provide resources through the annual Rough Sleeper Initiative funding. They also provided funding in 2020 and 2021 through the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme for capital projects that would support this aim. Southwark bid for a buyback initiative and has bought 20 homes that will be used for rough sleepers in perpetuity.

The Government is proposing some legislative change which is important in this space. The Renters Reform Bill will increase the security of tenure and protection from eviction of private sector tenants. Given loss of a private sector tenancy is the single biggest reason for homelessness nationally this is important legislation with an impact on homelessness.

The Council works collectively with the rest of London to lobby government about the pressures on housing and homelessness in the capital and the need to properly resource solutions through a long term rather than short term approach to both funding and infrastructure changes which will reduce levels of homelessness and help us to respond most effectively.

## 3. What is the council going to do about tenants that are under-occupying? Asking them to pay bedroom tax is not effective. Many sub-let and collect four or five times more that the tax from their lodgers.

We know there are households who are under occupying who want to move. A draft 'rightsizing plan' has been written which is currently going through its internal governance. The council is very keen that we help residents to find the property that is the right size for them through downsizing and mutual exchanges. We are currently developing our new council delivery plan which sets the priorities of the council for the next four years and rightsizing is included in that plan.

#### 4. How do you plan on tackling homelessness in the borough?

The Council sets its strategic priorities for preventing homelessness through its Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy. Southwark is in the process of working on a new Strategy which will be presented to Cabinet and go out for public consultation over the course of the next year.

The Council focusses on trying to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping whenever this is possible. There are a whole range of activities services do with residents to try to support them, these include:

- Providing housing advice about residents rights in their accommodation
- Providing advice to prevent tenants at risk of losing their existing homes
- Mediating with families and friends to prevent households losing their homes
- Intervening in private sector tenancy disputes to prevent homelessness
- Providing advice to residents in housing related debt to prevent homelessness (this includes allocating discretionary housing payments, benefit maximisation advice and other support)
- Working directly with partners to prevent homelessness. This includes through a Landlord Forum, Housing Association Forum and Homelessness Forum
- A variety of directly provided and commissioned services to respond to the needs of rough sleepers, including outreach, specialist navigators, and a housing first programme
- Working with social care, health, education and community safety on joint agendas to prevent homelessness

Where we are unable to prevent homelessness our services seek alternative accommodation options for residents. As an example we help resident's access resources in the private sector and to access supported housing options for vulnerable residents. We want to do more of this work with our residents and get to them at an earlier stage and we are currently looking at some of the ways that we can do this.

We work with landlords to procure accommodation that meets housing need and we are currently reviewing our approach to sourcing accommodation to increase the range and volume of property we can make available. Temporary accommodation is provided as a safety net.

Key data:

Homelessness preventions and early intervention outcomes	309 from 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2022 to 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2022
Number of households in temporary accommodation	3,579 as at 15 <sup>th</sup> July 2022
Number of new households approaching as homeless	275 from 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2022 to 15 <sup>th</sup> July 2022
Number of rough sleepers on the streets	20 - Snapshot at 15 <sup>th</sup> July 2022
Number of rough sleepers in emergency accommodation	76 as at 15 <sup>th</sup> July 2022

No further comments or questions were offered at meeting by attendees.

## 5. What do you have planned for tackling fire safety in Southwark-owned high-rise blocks?

Our plans for Southwark-owned high-rise blocks are being delivered under the Building Safety Programme.

The Programme is being delivered by 4 different Council departments. A Strategic Board oversees the Programme, this is chaired by the Strategic Director for Housing and Modernisation. We also use a Partnership Board to raise questions and concerns with the Department for Levelling Up and Communities, the London Fire Brigade and the Health and Safety Executive.

From August 2022, we will commencing our Priority Surveys – these will look at our High Rise blocks. These surveys will give us the data we need to meet the new requirements of the Fire Safety Act and the Building Safety Act. The Programme will include:

- Fire Risk Assessment Type 4s (intrusive surveys which look within flats)
- External Wall Surveys (surveys which look at the external walls of the building and anything attached to them, such as cladding or balconies). It should be noted that the Council has conducted EWS to check if any of its High Rise buildings have ACM on them (this was the cladding on Grenfell Tower). The Council's High Rise buildings not have ACM on them.
- Some blocks may need Structural Surveys too (surveys which look at the structural integrity of the building)

For a small number of our High Rise blocks, we have works ongoing and these are being reviewed by a Fire Engineer, where required. After the Priority Surveying Programme, we will take any necessary remedial actions for the other blocks.

Other workstreams of the programme are looking at: Data, Resident Participation, Recruitment & Training, New Homes, Building Control & Planning, Leaseholders concerns, and Finances.

Darren stressed that all blocks are being checked and it is important to have resident feedback. Look out for the letters which indicate what and why tasks are being carried out, to assure you that all necessary areas are being checked. Areas which are highlighted as concerns will be reported to residents immediately and any prevention measures required will be put in place to ensure safety.

Member mentioned Tower Blocks UK who have been auditing Southwark's fire risk assessments for the past 3 years and shows that the state of blocks has deteriorated. This information has been shared with previous cabinet ministers, but not really acted upon. The feeling is that, if something isn't done soon, we will end up with another fatal fire in a block within Southwark. Cllr. Cryan pledged in 2017 that type 4 FRA would be carried out on the 174 high rise blocks. The reality is that only eight had been done. The speed of work needs to be prioritised and accelerated, as there are vulnerable blocks that really need to be addressed.

It was also mentioned that all blocks need to be checked, not just the high-rise, as the materials used for new kitchens, bathrooms in the better homes project are questionable. With sub-contractors carrying out work, who is ensuring work is done correctly and of a standard to ensure safety? Re-wiring is often required, but there is a concern that where leaseholders are having this work carried out themselves, are they having their properties checked, as this could be a potential hazard, putting surrounding homes in danger. There are also blocks that have had work done that wasn't signed off and have been identified

as needing work carried out. Also, if the work is to be done swiftly, are there enough staff on the ground to carry out such work? It was suggested that a liaison officer should be appointed to approach people to verbally explain what is happening, as not everyone can read but need to know why this is so important.

Darren appreciated comments made and stipulated that is why safety is his priority, but with approx. 65,000 homes, it is going to take time to check them all. High-rise is the priority at the moment, but all homes will be checked to ensure safety for everyone. There are also new provisions in place. BT, for example, may poke holes through walls for wiring. They have to obtain a works permit to carry out work, so their work can be checked to ensure compartmentalisation has not been compromised. Unfortunately it has taken the Grenfell tragedy to make people more aware and to take these matters seriously. Fortunately, the attitude is changing and building regulations have changed. Especially regarding fire safety. A new Building Safety Director has just been appointed and he is recruiting a team to start the work in August and he will be accountable to ensure works are carried out.

The hope, is that a letter will be distributed to all homes in a block that is scheduled to be inspected, informing of when it is happening, what they will be doing and what they are looking for. A type 4 inspection will require access into homes to carry out checks. If there is a strong TRA within a block, the fire regulations officer should approach them to have a meeting with the residents to explain and reassure of what and why they are doing investigations.

There will be a schedule made available once it has been planned for people to see when their area is diarised.

Darren agreed that not everyone has ability to read and will suggest that the RSOs' are trained and that part of their job will be to door knock to advise and answer any questions people may have.

**Action:** *Darren to liaise with Danielle as the research conducted on fire risk assessments does not correspond with information provided by Southwark.*

**Action:** *Darren to share schedule of fire risk inspections, when ready for SGTO to share with membership.*

6. [With regards to fire safety, how will you do things differently to your predecessors?](#)

Fire safety has always been a priority for the Council. However, the new legislation will require some changes. These are being delivered by the Building Safety Programme, as discussed above. Furthermore, during December 2021, we received approval for an Assistant Director for Building Safety - this post has been recruited to. The Assistant Director is now hiring to a new Building Safety Team, which will give the Council the leadership, expertise and capacity it needs to deliver the changes.

7. [What are the Council's plans for dealing with the lengthy waiting lists for social housing and what sort of mechanism are currently in place to ensure that if people do find themselves in privately rented accommodation, that this is both temporary and the accommodation is up to standard \(including affordability\). Alternatively, does the Council hopes that people will adapt and will continue renting privately rather than seeking out a council accommodation/remaining on Council accommodation waiting lists?](#)

There is just not enough social housing for everyone that wants it. The private sector can represent a good option that is of good condition and affordable. Whilst we do not underestimate the current challenges with securing enough good quality and affordable accommodation in the private sector for residents, we have to accept that this accommodation provides part of the response to housing need. It would be unrealistic faced with current levels of demand and social housing waiting times not to take this view.

What we recognise we need to do is work with residents to identify options which are suitable for them (and this includes affordable and in good condition) and will allow them to settle and thrive. We are also working with landlords to ensure they understand the importance of decent standards and good management of these tenancies and will continue to extend those relationships so the sector provides a good response to housing need.

The Renters Reform Bill provides an opportunity to enshrine better rights/security for tenants and if the Government moves ahead with this legislation it should support our direction to make the private sector a tenure of choice for residents, alongside the other housing options available.

8. How does the Council plan to deal with people who do not have English as their first language and struggle to even understand basic application process for Council property? Is the Council planning to address this similarly to boroughs such as Tower Hamlets where most of the info is translated into Bengali to accommodate the large Bangladeshi community living in the area?

We have a telephone translation service that works directly with customer services officers/service point and customers to complete application forms.

We are in the process of reviewing our forms and will consider translation and other accessibility requirements in implementing the new form.

9. Veronica Naraine, 22 Haymere house, Haymere Road, SE15.6TE. Veronica has lived there for 51 years, now disabled bidding for over 4 years and needing a ground floor flat with 2 bedrooms. Veronica is in a 3 bedroom at the moment. Other people have been bidding just over a year and has moved. Veronica is feeling very low, due to health issues. When will she be moved?

I cannot discuss the resident's case in a public setting but I can confirm that officers will be in touch with her to discuss her situation and to support her to make a successful bid for a new home.

10. Why are people who were born and have a history of family in this area having to put up with being in expensive temporary housing and not moved to a social housing property? They are put into a trap we're the rent is too high and they end up being in rent arrears so cannot bid.

Unfortunately there is not enough social housing available to provide a home for everyone that wants one. At the end of June 2022 there were 17,097 households waiting on the housing register. The number of homes that become available each year is insufficient to meet rising demand, despite the work we do to manage that demand through providing housing advice about options.

The table below shows the numbers of new council and housing association homes becoming available each year to the housing register has declined. This snapshot shows the position as at end of June 2022.

Year	Supply let
2022	291(to date)
2021	835
2020	853
2019	1,043
2018	1,462
2017	1,603
2016	1,410
2015	1,684

On top of the already delivered 2,500 new homes, the Council has made a commitment to develop 1,500 new homes to meet housing need – 1,000 for general needs residents on the housing register and 500 for key workers. This is one of the biggest commitments to develop new supply by any council. Homes however take time to deliver and a number of those being developed in Southwark are part of broader regeneration schemes and will only become available as those new schemes are completed.

Where residents do not have priority for a social home the council can provide advice about alternative options, including in the private sector.

We are focussed on trying to prevent residents needing to go into temporary accommodation. We understand this is not good for residents, it is also very expensive for the council and increasingly difficult for us to secure locally (or at all) given the rising cost and demand in London for this type of provision and the increasing scarcity since the pandemic. That does not however mean we will be able to offer all those residents a social housing solution. We will work with residents to identify the appropriate solution, suitable for their individual circumstances.

11. [The Council has destroyed the cordial relationship it once had with residents. The council has dismantled various tenant movement structures that supported tenant/resident engagement. How do you intend to rebuild that trust and cordial relationship with tenants and residents going forward?](#)

The national arena for Resident Involvement (RI) has moved on considerably following the Southwark RI Review as a result of the Grenfell Tower fire.

Firstly, the National Housing Federation rolled out a 'Together With Tenants Charter' and the commitments in the charter have been adopted by the Regulator for Social Housing. As a result, there are exciting new measures in the Social Housing Regulation Bill currently going through parliament, to re-centre tenants at the heart of a social landlord's housing service.

What that means for Southwark, is a fresh look at how RI is carried out. This doesn't mean starting from scratch but is more about working with residents to improve what we have and introduce some new involvement mechanisms to suit more residents. What this means in practice is re-setting the Local Housing Forums alongside the Chairs, to make them more interesting and relevant for local people. Also picking up the Tenants' Charter commitments to:

- Establish meaningful resident engagement in decision making

- Work collaboratively with residents to design mechanisms for oversight (monitoring the performance of housing services in the local area)
- Support residents to hold the organisation to account
- Be open to the challenges that all of this brings

The RI Team will also launch a new Menu of Involvement, which will give tenants the opportunity to dip in and out of involvement in a way that suits them. This is in terms of the time they have available and in way that suits their lifestyle. The message the team will be putting out, is that if there isn't anything in the menu that suits you, suggest a way you would like to be involved and we will try and make it happen.

Finally, each Tenant and Homeowner Involvement Officer will be carrying out a detailed development plan with each and every TRA to ensure that they are adequately supported and assisted to reach their goals. Work will also be undertaken to support residents to set up TRAs in areas where there is no existing group but there is an appetite to get something going.

All of this will be detailed in the forthcoming Resident Involvement Strategy. Off which I'm happy to come back and discuss with yourselves.

It was pointed out that residents want to be a critical friend, but when you are treated as the enemy and there has been so much hurt caused for reasons that no one can understand, there is a lot of work needed to suppress the damage that has been done. When will the improved working relationships be introduced, as we need a timeframe as to when to expect the new structure to start?

Darren said that residents should be involved from the start as these are your homes and wants a relationship where tenants can be critical friends, where everyone has respect for one another and can have conversations to discuss strategy changes and procurements. Vision is for every estate to have a functioning TRA for resident involvement, to feel engaged and have pride and a say on what's happens on your estates. Again, working together, we can aim to achieve this, but culture needs to change with the council and culture with engagement with residents needs to change. We need to move forward and focus on how we can work together now. There will be times when we can't agree, but this is when we can have discussions together to move on. You will be listened to and your opinions taken on-board. September, we should have feedback and by working with all, can find ways to move forward.

## 12. What will Cllr Merrill do differently in order to repair the repairs service?

The repairs improvement plan was agreed by Cabinet in March 2020 and the service was then moved into Housing and Modernisation department a week after lockdown. Despite moving to essential repairs only and the inevitable slower progress of the plan due to the pandemic was inevitable.

Nonetheless some changes have taken back to support the service including rolling out a new IT system to manage works more effectively. We have started to recruit more multi-skilled operatives, set up a task team to deal with more complex issues or jobs that have not been progressing, started an instant feedback process by phone or SMS, started a programme of repairs action days. Some of the work is behind the scenes, modernising the service and not all improvements will be seen immediately but the complete focus is on improvement which prioritises works in residents' homes.



My priorities are right first time, length of time to do repairs, more proactive maintenance and involving residents from concept to completion of works.

It was noted there seems to be a lack of accountability, promises not kept and the staff already on the ground lack competence, so how can this service be repaired using the same team? Contractors, sub-contractors carry out poor repairs, where there should be someone checking their work to ensure it is to standard. It appears the council only want to employ multi-traders, which causes the issue, as a carpenter is expected to know about plumbing and vice-versa. You need to have skilled people in their field to ensure the work is done correctly and not a 'Jack of all trades, Master of none'. Apprentice programmes should be in place to train new people and to train them in individual subjects, so they have expertise in what they are doing and not a little knowledge to do everything. It doesn't matter if someone has to return to complete a job, the main objective is that it is done right.

The previous repairs core group were individuals attending for their own issues and not speaking for their estate, so how would a new group be formed as it needs to be representatives speaking on behalf of what is happening across the borough.

Darren said that being a carpenter of 30+ years, he has been shocked with some of the work he has witnessed that would not be allowed to get away with in the private sector. The Council is large and by checking the KPI figures, a lot of the work is carried out properly. The problem is that the small percentage that aren't, can turn into thousands and the intention is to get on the ground and see first-hand their performance and how they do their jobs because the standards of repairs need to be improved from what they are at present. It could be down to management, call centre but all aspects will be investigated to see how we can fix things. The council are currently working on what the client wants and that is to get the job done right first time, this takes a skilled person, but there is no reason why someone can't have additional skills to finish a job off if the main structure has already been prepared. A multi-trade operative is someone who has an understanding of someone else's trade and will know not to do, or how to do some things. Having listened to the comments that operatives are not trained and unable to carry out work effectively which then has a knock-on effect and causes another problem, Darren apologised and acknowledged that these are issues being raised frequently which is why he is committed in taking steps to improve the repairs service. Whether you are in the private sector or a council tenant, everyone deserves to have the work carried out to good standard. Trades people don't go out with the intention of doing a bad job, so we need to look at why these failings are happening, are they not allotted enough time to carry out work, given sub-standard materials, incorrect materials. Darren said that the key is to observe what is happening by obtaining feedback from residents. He is looking to introduce a resident led board to scrutinise how works are done and to hold the council accountable. This group would hopefully be made up with residents from different estates and possibly with expertise in the field, but as diverse as possible to collate as much information from across the Borough. They would join the board on the understanding that they are not there to discuss personal issues, but for what is happening across the Borough.

Your knowledge is vital on what is happening on your estates, and we can only get better if we all work together.

13. [Is he planning to consult with the staff who do the repairs?](#)

Started to become more familiar with the service and will determine how I will engage in due course. I will need to hear from everyone involved in the service. My vision is that we have a number one repair service that meets resident's expectation and needs, Part of this will be to look at what improvements we can make on the ground and key to that is to have buy in from the staff.

14. [Will new targets around service delivery be set and how will they be monitored?](#)

Part of the plan includes reviewing key performance indicators over the course of its life. I will also be looking at how residents can help improve monitoring of the service. What KPI do you want to see that make sense.

15. [It feels like there is a lack of accountability regarding repairs and mould/damp issues, estate cleaning, failing district heating and other issues, with tenants sometimes writing to their housing officers, as well as contacting the repairs team, but never hearing back from them. It's often the case that it's only when a local councillor or MP intervenes, sometimes more than once, that things start to move. How will you create a culture of accountability that appears to be currently lacking?](#)

We are working on a comprehensive damp and mould strategy which we have been engaging with residents on currently. The front end of the service is currently operated within the corporate contact centre and the customer experience team. A feasibility study and impact assessment is currently being undertaken to realise the aim of an integrated repairs service.

Please see response below on estate cleaning.

16. [With regards to estate cleaning, it seems like the service often struggles to cover all estates due to a lack of cleaners. If Cllr Merrill aware of this problem and if so, does he have any plans to solve it?](#)

The estate cleaning service ensures that there are sufficient staff to carry out the scheduled cleaning duties for each block/estate under their responsibility. The resource levels are reviewed annually and adjustments made to increase or decrease the level of resources based on the local knowledge of the estate cleaning supervisors with input from both RSO's and residents.

There are occasions when staff absences such as sickness mean that resources become more stretched however this is normally dealt with by the introduction of temporary agency workers or permanent cleaning staff covering for their colleagues on an overtime basis.

During the pandemic staffing was also greatly impacted as the team had to adjust for health and safety reasons and to comply with government guidelines. During this time we had to prioritise certain cleaning services over some task within the estates.

The area office team regularly conduct joint monthly estate inspections with the cleaning team accompanied by TRA reps/residents of the estates who have voluntarily given us their time. This gives the team, the cleaning team and residents the opportunity to assess the cleaning standard amongst other things.

The RSOs are also regularly out on the estate and liaise with the cleaning team where they identify any cleaning failings.

We are looking for more volunteers to be part of the estate inspections so they can have a say on how the estates are managed. If anyone is interested please contact the RSO.

If there are particular estates or locations that Cllr Merrill is made aware of we would be happy to investigate the concerns and take the necessary actions.

Cleaning is top of our agenda and we are currently reviewing the service and KPIs to determine where we can improve the service.

17. Now that the Roof Top Developments have been cancelled, is the council still confident that it will achieve its home-building targets?

Yes the council remain confident in achieving their build targets.

Darren expressed that, yes, the council are confident in meeting targets and there are enough proposed developments that could make sure they meet the requirements over the next 5-6 years. If rooftop developments are looked at again in the future, the process will be done in a much more considerate manner with the consent of the residents. If there are empty blocks, then the development would be done there first, as no impact to residents living below.

18. There is huge concern across Southwark about the state of the repairs service. We are pleased that the Council are considering re-establishing the Repairs Core Group, but how do you see this being set up and where would its membership come from?

The core membership would be residents, In order to keep our residents and in particular our tenants at the heart of the repairs service improvements it is essential that they have a voice in the shaping and scrutinising of the service. Therefore we have agreed that a new resident-led repairs board will be put in place to drive up the repairs standards across our council homes. I would like to see this board to be as diverse in representation as possible, making sure it reflexes the population of Southwark. At present I am working on how this can be done. In a way that has merit. The main role of the board will be to scrutinise the Repairs Service Improvement Plan, receive updates and KPI's and to provide a resident voice. I hopeful that we can have a draft paper on the makeup of the board and its terms over the summer ready to consult on over the autumn.

Also covered in question 12.

19. In 2020, Brenley House, Betsham House and Boughton House on the Tabard Gardens Estate were identified as having the potential for rooftop development/upward extensions. At that time, officers forgot to mention that the council had already submitted a planning application to develop a flat on top of Balin House. Had council officers forgotten to mention any other rooftop developments or building projects on the estate?

I have been reassured that the officers have not forgotten to mention any over building projects on the estate

20. Residents opposed the development at Balin House, and the planning application was dropped and the other named rooftop developments put on hold. When the council came back in 2021, Brenley House, Betsham House and Boughton House were still identified as having the potential to or rooftop development/upward extensions, and Balin and Northfleet House were added as well. In addition, officers revealed plans for an in-fill development in the Brenley/ Boughton car

park, which they had forgotten to mention previously. Are there any other in-fill developments proposed for the estate that officers have forgotten to mention?

No

21. Today, I received a letter stating the council has decided not to go ahead with the rooftop extensions planned for Tabard Gardens. Does this also apply to the in-fill development in the Brenley/ Boughton car park?

Based on a commissioned architectural capacity study the infill site at Tennis Street carpark has the potential to provide the council with 19 new homes and still offer existing resident parking albeit at less levels. The council may choose to progress this scheme at a point in the future. If this was to go ahead then residents would be fully consulted on the scheme.

A member spoke of the fact that the proposed rooftop development had been stopped, but the Council failed to inform them of an infill block, that would have a direct impact on three buildings around it on Tabard gardens and whether it was going ahead. It would appear that there is a lack of consultation across the Borough with regards to development/infill etc. and some infills are going ahead, despite objection from residents and also an area where council housing was supposed to be built, but is now proposed to be an office block.

Darren answered that for rooftop developments, structural engineers and the building control element had checked and it could be done, but when it came to the fire risk assessment and the cost, it was more than expected and not acceptable answers provided. He decided to cancel these developments as it was unfair on residents who had lived with the stress from this possibility for past 2-3 years, and would obviously have an impact on them, as you can't expect to build on top of something and it not have issues.

Infills are still in the planning process as properties need to be built, but unsure how far the proposed for Tabard Gardens has got, but will find out. The best way to consult with residents on proposed infills is being looked at, to ensure that residents are involved in different schemes on their estates and help in decision making when it comes down to design, colour of bricks etc.

Unfortunately, to supply the 11,000 homes, there has to be compromise and therefore some green areas will have to be built on. There are too many people in temporary accommodation, overcrowded, and over 16,000 people on waiting list for a home, so homes need to be built and some green areas used to cover the need. Developers will be help to account to ensure they deliver within the planning rules and regulations.

**Action:** *Darren to find out how far the infill planning on Tabard Gardens has got for Peter.*

22. Was there ever any structural surveys to ensure that the rooftop extensions proposed at Tabard Gardens were structurally sound and safe to build?

Based on the Web Yates recent structural surveys, undertaken on similar blocks in the borough, the council was confident of its ability to deliver a single storey extension on Tabard Gardens. However, no specific survey was undertaken at Tabards as this was too early in the projects development.

23. Has there been any site or structural survey to ensure that the proposed in-fill development at Brenley/ Boughton car park is structurally sound and safe to build?

A structural assessment for the new building would only be undertaken during its design. We would not structurally assess a development plot at such an early stage, by way of geotechnical investigations.

24. In 2019, many residents of Tabard Gardens were required to remove security gates, seating, mats etc. from outside their homes, ostensibly for fire safety reason. However, this was not applied uniformly across the estate – why not? Has the comprehensive review of Fire Safety policies and procedures, that residents were informed about, been completed and if so what were the outcomes?

There was a change of approach from zero tolerance works after complaints to councillors which resulted in questions being raised at Council Assembly. The message that came back was zero tolerance was not an acceptable overall approach, and a change to a managed approach adopted. This meant that neighbouring blocks to those that had been cleared under zero tolerance were then managed differently (managed approach), which I can understand likely caused some umbrage and confusion to the residents in the cleared blocks under zero tolerance.

There was also a pilot on removing grilles and fitting security doors that was also put on hold due to feedback received from councillors and Residents Services subsequently a paper on grilles went to Resident Services DMT last week. A few amendments are required and it will then be presented to Senior Management Team (SMT) and Lead Member Briefing (LMB) in August/ September. Following this, a programme to remove all grilles across the borough will be implemented.

### 3. **Minutes of Group Meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022 & Matters Arising**

Agreed as a true record.

Proposed by: Chris Meregini

Seconded: Sam Vacciana

No matters arising

### 4. **SGTO AGM on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

It was explained that literature appertaining to SGTO AGM had been circulated by email, and to some by post.

The nomination form and directors statement to be completed had been set up as a fillable form, so people need to download, complete fields required and then email back, so no printing necessary.

We have also requested that people inform us whether they will be attending in person or on zoom. This ensures we can make provisions for those wishing to attend face to face.

There is a polling facility on zoom which will be used for zoom participants and then show of hands for those at centre.

Cris reiterated how important the AGM is for SGTO and encouraged all to complete nomination forms and to attend the meeting. We are telling the council that we need a tenants federation, so it is imperative that the AGM is a success.

### 5. **SGTO Tenants Conference – Update – Sat 17<sup>th</sup> Sept'22**

The council have awarded £7000 to host a conference which has been arranged for Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> September at City of London Academy, 240 Lynton Rd, London SE1 5LA from 9am – 5pm Great venue and we encourage all to attend.

One key item is to discuss repairs service and we want to invite representative from each of the three trade unions to attend and speak. Acorn Union, to see what they are about and whether to invite?

**Agenda for conference:**

1. Introduction from Cris,
2. Followed by speakers from council to open questions and discussions.  
Structure of conference - Two big themes in morning, lunch and then three smaller workshops for the afternoon:
3. *Morning Themes:*
  1. Resident Involvement
  2. Repairs
4. *Afternoon Workshops:*
  1. TRAs' - what they are, how they support a community and how to get involved.
  2. Health & Wellbeing – also links to repairs through living in damp, mould properties which impact on health, either physically or mentally.
  3. Knowing Your Rights – inform people of their rights for repair, how and when should be consulted
5. Groups return together to discuss workshops
6. Panel debate
7. Closing speaker

Jack announced that there is a space, where various organisations will be invited to attend, to set up a stall to provide information and assistance on cost of living crisis, food banks, contractors etc.

Cris invited Darren to attend the conference and spend the day talking to residents and joining in with day's events.

**Action:** *Darren to diarise Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> September to join tenants' conference.*

**Action:** *Julie to pass on Cris' contact details to April Ashley*

**Action:** *To find out what Acorn Union do and whether suitable to invite to conference*

**8. Good Governance Institute (GGI) independent review**

Presentation from the SGTO Board

The SGTO employed GGI to carry out a review to help to improve the organisation.

They are a consultancy organisation, where you explain what and how the organisation operates and from an independent perspective, they offer ideas and methods to improve service delivery.

Their review, which could cost anything from 10,000-50,000, was carried out for free and a report was produced, which will be presented to members.

Following surveys and conversations with Council Officials, SGTO Board and Tenants, comments and suggestions have been proposed by GGI in adapting the SGTO and improving the work ethics, whilst also highlighting where we are doing well.

This report will hopefully show the council that we are sincere and serious in moving forward to provide the best possible service we can.

**9. Any other business**

No, AOB

**Meeting Closed:** 9pm

**Date of next meeting:** 28<sup>th</sup> September 2022 (AGM)

**Actions:**

2.5 – page 4

**Action:** *Darren to liaise with Danielle as the research conducted on fire risk assessments does not correspond with information provided by Southwark.*

**Action:** *Darren to share schedule of fire risk inspections, when ready for SGTO to share with membership.*

2.21 – page 12

**Action:** *Darren to find out how far the infill planning on Tabard Gardens has got for Peter.*

5 – page 13

**Action:** *Darren to diarise Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> September to join tenants conference.*

**Action:** *Julie to pass on Cris' contact details to April Ashley*

**Action:** *To find out what Acorn Union do and whether suitable to invite to conference*