



# Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations

*Bells Gardens Community Centre,  
19 Buller Close, London,*

*Campaigning for Housing Rights and Council Homes*

*SE15 6UJ*

## Group Meeting Minutes

**Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023, 7:00 – 9:00pm**

### On Zoom

**Staff:** Margaret Onwuta, Ahmed Kabba, Georgie Hodges, Jack Lewis

**Attendees: 23 total**

**Apologies:** Amanda Carey (staff), Caroline Platt, Lydia Kaddu Busagwa, Al-Issa Munu, Colin Harrison, Jennifer Quinton Chelley, Carol Vincent

#### **1. Welcome and Introduction**

Chris welcomed everyone and wished everyone a Happy New Year.

#### **2. Minutes of Group Meeting held on 26th October 2022 and Matters Arising**

Agreed as a true record –

Proposed by Cris Claridge

Seconded by Althea Smith

#### **Matters arising:**

##### **Repairs Action Point:**

It was raised that a repairs conference has not been organised as yet. This is to be put together and the Chair welcomed members to put themselves forward for the working party.

It was suggested that the previous group who were part of the last tenants conference working party be the ones to arrange it, with additional members who showed an interest: Saidat, Kiri and Althea.

It was asked if the previous group had a terms of reference, where a response was given that it was a task and finish group.

### **Information on Downsizing Action Point:**

A question had been raised on property downsizing, where information was passed to the individual who made request.

Link for information: <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/finding-a-new-home/smart-move-scheme>

**Action:** SGTO to put together a working party focused on organising a repairs conference

### **3. Minutes of Group Meeting held on 7th December 2022 and Matters Arising**

Agreed as a true record:

Proposed by Kiri Pieri

Seconded by Cris Claridge

#### **Matters arising:**

#### **The council's inaction on their action points from the previous meeting:**

It was suggested that another stronger letter be sent to Cllr Darren Merrill and Nat Stevens from the Council for them to provide their findings following the last meeting on SGTO funding, where no response has been received since a reminder letter was sent 3 weeks ago. Despite a comment made that the Council are carrying out a consultation with TRA chairs, the letter should be sent now as questions remain unanswered. It was agreed that the letter needs to be sent straight away, by Monday 30<sup>th</sup>/Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> January offering the Council a week to respond.

**Action:** SGTO to write a harsh letter to the council to ask what is happening with the SGTO funding.

**Action:** SGTO to request to see the advice the council were given which left them compelled to put the contract out to tender.

### **4. Feedback from meeting with Council on Rent Increase**

Chris outlined that when the government raised the issue of the rent caps before it got to local authorities, SGTO had responded to a series of questions in a letter, which we are still waiting on a response to on.

SGTO Response Social Housing Rent Capping (Item 1) - attached

HRA Indicative Rent and Budget Setting 2023-24 (Item 2) – attached

### **Comments about the non-Functional Tenants Forum:**

It was mentioned that the Council did not communicate or share details appertaining to the contents of the proposed meeting, which made it farcical as no one knew that it was to discuss rent, therefore no recommendations were made on rent increases. The purpose of the forum meeting was for the Council to inform of the rent increases, there was no consultation prior to this decision as stated in previous minutes supplied by the council from 6<sup>th</sup> December '22.

The government gave the council information, only a few days before Christmas, putting them in a difficult position. Previously it would have gone to area forums, then to tenants' council **twice** before a decision was put in place. A suggestion was made to the officers in charge of this meeting to plan future consultations, in conjunction with SGTO, and that the Council should go back to the old structure, The council should have started consulting in November.

We cannot make any difference to the council's decision now, but this scenario highlights that the consultation process has broken down. The council need to improve support for TRAs and to improve the consultation process.

'Emphasis on rebuilding a meaningful consultation process'.

Without a massive campaign, the council are not going to go back on their 7% rent rise, therefore people should join the day of action on the 11<sup>th</sup> February, details below:

**Day of Action to demand a rent freeze – 11<sup>th</sup> February 2023, would be good if the SGTO can publicise this and encourage people to come to this. Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2023, 12:00pm, Department of Levelling Up, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF**

**Action:** SGTO to write to the council regarding the conduct of the "consultation" at the Tenants Forum to express that this was not a consultation. Ask to reconvene a time for TRAs to have discussion around this. In the letter to emphasise on rebuilding a meaningful consultation process and to look into bringing back the old structures.

**Action:** SGTO to share the Day of Action to demand a rent freeze with members and councillors.

## **SGTOs recommendation to the council – Jack:**

### Background to document:

The government's original position was that social housing rent rises would be limited to the rise of inflation +1%, but with the dramatic increase of inflation the government ran a consultation to put a smaller cap onto the increases of rent to make sure rents weren't increasing as quickly as inflation. The government ran a consultation on a 5% 'rent ceiling' to cap the increase of rent at 5% per year.

SGTO provided a written response, which was created following speaking to members and alongside London Tenants Federation who was pushing for a rent and service charge freeze.

Following the consultation, the government came back and increased the cap to a 7% rent cap. Now that this is policy the council have adopted to take effect in April 2023. SGTO hasn't been listened to in neither the government's policy nor in the council's policy, and consultation has been poor here too. Last year there was an online form where residents could directly feedback to the council regarding the HRA budget setting, this hasn't been made available this year.

Next steps would be to focus on why residents weren't consulted in a meaningful way.

### **Further Comments:**

A demand can still be made for a rent freeze, following a successful campaign for a rent freeze in Scotland, which was funded by the Scottish Government. Address the fight to the government, and ask that the council support this fight.

It was asked, if these recommendations can be taken to a full council meeting?

Issues around the HRA were raised in a [deputation on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023](#).

Further Information: Cabinet Meeting - 17.01.2023 (Item 3) – attached

## **5. Any Other Business**

No other business.

**Meeting Closed 9.00pm**

**Next Group Meeting: Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023**

## **Actions:**

### October Minutes

**Action:** SGTO to put together a working party focused on organising a repairs conference

### December Minutes

**Action:** SGTO to write a harsh letter to the council to ask what is happening with the SGTO funding.

**Action:** SGTO to request to see the advice the council were given which left them compelled to put the contract out to tender.

### January Meeting

**Action:** SGTO to write to the council regarding the conduct of the "consultation" at the Tenants Forum to express that this was not a consultation. Ask to reconvene a time for TRAs to have discussion around this. In the letter to emphasise on rebuilding a meaningful consultation process and to look into bringing back the old structures.

**Action:** SGTO to share the Day of Action to demand a rent freeze with members and councillors.