



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 Wednesday 28th February 2024 7.00pm – 9.00pm

Staff: Margaret Onwuta, Amanda Carey, Ahmed Kabba, Joe Snazell-Holding, Ygerne Price-Davies

Attendees: 27

Apologies: Carol Vincent, Colin Harrison, Richard Lee, Cllr Sarah K (LBS)

1. Welcome, Introductions & Apologies

The Chair (Chris M) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes of Group Meeting held on 24th January and Matters Arising

Althea Smith proposed the minutes of the previous group meeting were true and correct. Sharon Baah seconded.

Cris C queried the outcome of the BSRA De-recognition agenda item of the previous meeting. Chris (Chair) replied that a sub-committee has been set up to deal with the item. Althea S adds that the last board meeting was inquorate, so they were unable to report back yet. She adds that the sub-committee are still waiting for the Leathermarket JMB (TMO) to supply their constitution for review and are in the process of setting up a meeting with Nat and Cheryl to have a conversation about the issue.

3. Meet & Greet Sarah King – Cabinet Member for Housing

Chris (Chair) informed the group that Cllr Sarah K (LBS) was unable to attend this meeting due to a last-minute development, and that she requests to be informed of the next meeting date. Brendan O comments that if a member of LBS sends apologies for a meeting they should send a deputy in their place to cover. He adds that a problem with LBS's financial issues, that they often use as an excuse for poor services, is contributed to by the way in which LBS spends money. He cites repairs as an example of this, whereby repairmen have come to a property multiple times to do the same job, and LBS staff hours are wasted/taken up with dealing with resident complaints over poor repair work. Sharon suggests that the next time SGTO invites LBS staff/politicians, and they do not show up/do not give over 12hrs notice of apologies, that SGTO write a letter of complaint to parliament.

4. Meet & Greet invitation, Hakeem Osinaike New Director of Housing

Chris (Chair) updated the group on the meet & greet with Hakeem Osinaike, the new Director of Housing for LBS. SGTO representatives met with him a couple of weeks ago and are thinking of inviting him to one of the following group meetings. Chris (Chair) welcomed the group for comments/advice on this item as it is still active. Althea S suggested that we promote the group

meeting we have with Mr Osinaike to our community, and have the meeting be in person. Sharon B agrees with this suggestion and adds that SGTO bring all outstanding actions from LBS's Housing Department to said meeting to present to Mr Osinaike for comment/review, so as to get a plan as to how these actions are to be implemented/resolved. Chris (Chair) replied that we (SGTO) will gather topics/agenda items for said meeting in preparation for Mr Osinaike's visit. A debate followed as to whether this meeting should be in-person/hybrid/online. Cris C added that it would be a good idea to request from Mr Osinaike that in preparation of the meeting, he produces a statement/strategy on the future of resident engagement in Southwark and how he intends to set up something that is fit for purpose. Chris (Chair) replied for Cris C to hold that thought as an addition when brainstorming the agenda items for the meeting. Brendan O adds that we should ask Mr Osinaike to publish/report his handover brief from his predecessor so the public are aware of the continuity of work being undertaken by LBS. Nat Stevens (LBS) assures the group that a LBS staff member (David Q-H) has been the acting strategic director of housing for LBS since Micheal S left and so there is sure to be a transition handover when Mr Osinaike starts on 1st March.

Chris (Chair) states we will gather our thoughts of how to approach the invitation of Mr Osinaike and organize this meeting to take place in person at Bells Community Centre if people are willing to commit to it. He adds we will gather the thoughts expressed here tonight (listed in agenda items 3 & 4) to come up with a list of agenda items.

As Mr Osinaike starts on 1st March, Cris C proposes that at our next meeting we invite no LBS staff and politicians (residents & SGTO staff only) to review SGTO and the resident's movement at large to assess ourselves and see where we are going wrong, and what we need to do to move forward, and put together an action plan. Sharon seconds this proposal and requests that SGTO be more forefront in the residents' movement. Chris (Chair) comments that if we decide on this proposal then we may invite Mr Osinaike for the group meeting after that (in April). Cris C requests that SGTO produce a punchy advert for this meeting that encourages residents to attend.

Actions:

SGTO (Members, Board or TRA's?) will gather topics/agenda items for the group meeting with Mr Osinaike, and decide which group meeting to invite him to (April suggested).

SGTO (Board?) to consider and confirm Cris C's proposal for a resident-only meeting to assess SGTO's strategy at next month's (March) group meeting.

Joe (Staff) to produce an advert/flyer for the March group meeting and to publicise the meeting and encourage greater attendance.

5. Any Other Business

• No Threat of Eviction for Heating Arrears – Lambeth Tenants Heat Campaign Requests Support from SGTO & Southwark's TRAs.

Althea S explains that this issue was brought to light at the London Tenants Federation (LTF). She outlines that LTF has requested SGTO support Lambeth in their fight to stop residents getting evicted due to them being in arrears with their heating bills. She says there is a petition and protests outside Lambeth town hall against this Lambeth Council policy. She proposes that SGTO support Lambeth residents in this campaign and sign the petition.

Chris (Chair) states that if we decide to sign the petition then only 1 signature that represents SGTO shall be submitted.

Tanya M posted the petition in the SGTO WhatsApp group, and states that 1 signature is needed per organisation only, but this includes TRA's, so each TRA can also add an additional signature representing themselves if they wish. She adds that Lambeth Council has increased heating charges for those on a district heating network by 350%. She states that as heating charges are counted as rent, Lambeth Council has the right to evict residents in heating bill arrears, and are threatening residents with this, whilst refusing to provide subsidies for residents who are unable to pay.

Sharon B requests that Tanya M put something in writing for us, promoting this movement and the need for our support, and the support of TRA's and private organisations as well. Tanya M directs the group to the webpage (linked below) for further details on the campaign.

Brendan O suggests that the campaign reach out to the previous leader of Lewisham Council, Damien Egan, for support on this issue, as this may add some political clout to the campaign. He also suggests the campaign refer to Southwark Law Centre to try and find the legal grounding of this issue. He also posted this article for the group to read, detailing Lambeth's Council's justification for the 350% heating bill increase:

<https://newsfromcrystalpalace.wordpress.com/2024/01/17/heating-costs-full-lambeth-council-statement-with-further-comments-on-the-issue/>

If you wish to learn more about this campaign, please read this blog:

<https://www.fuelpovertyaction.org.uk/guest-blog-lambeth-tenants-heat-campaign/>

or Email: heatingcampaign@hotmail.com

Actions:

Chris (Chair) shall sign his name on behalf of SGTO to the petition in support of the Lambeth Tenants Heat Campaign.

SGTO (staff) shall send the Tenants Heat Campaign petition to our membership to allow TRA's to also sign it.

• Cold Weather Protest by Fuel Poverty Coalition (Fuel Poverty Action), Wed 6th March 2024.

Tanya M encourages residents and SGTO to attend the protest.

Ygerne (staff) asks if any SGTO member would like to attend the protest on behalf of SGTO, and if so please to email her at: ygerne@sgto.co.uk

• Government Consultation on Reforms to Social Housing Allocations.

Tanya M highlights this consultation, stating that the government is attempting to make it harder for people not born in this country to get a social home by changing the qualifications for people to apply to the social housing register. This would make large numbers of people in Southwark ineligible for social housing. Additionally, the government want to introduce a 'pay to stay' policy, whereby non-British residents can be disqualified from applying for social housing, depending on their income. She proposes that SGTO respond to this consultation before the deadline on 26th March 2024.

Chris (Chair) stated we will be contacting the residents who made comments on the topic in this meeting (Sharon B, Tanya M, Cris C, Julie P, Brendan O etc.) to get their insight so as to respond to this consultation.

Link to this consultation: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-reforms-to-social-housing-allocations/consultation-on-reforms-to-social-housing-allocations>

Link to the survey: <https://consult.levellingup.gov.uk/social-housing-allocations/social-housing-allocations-reform-consultation/>

Actions:

SGTO (board) to decide if SGTO should respond to the Social Housing Allocation Consultation & share it with our members. If so, the board will delegate a staff member(s) to conduct the necessary resident research to produce the response. Said staff member(s) will contact the attendees of this meeting and the wider resident community for input.

• New LBS Technical Services Contractor & Repairs & Maintenance Contractors (Electrical Installations, Door Entry Systems, District Heating Maintenance, Communal Ventilation & Communal Cold-Water Services)

Brendan O notified the group that new contracts from LBS will be given out for the services listed above for the next 3-5 years. He asks whether SGTO are notified of these proposals and if they are not, they should be. He adds that borough-wide long-term contracts should be looked into and assessed by SGTO, as they can encourage poor services by the contractors due to the fact the contracts are so long-term and not tendered/assessed frequently. Brendan O cites a case at Devon Mansions where works that were not carried out were signed off by the contractors as completed. Brendan proposes that a contract tender process that is more itemised and specified to key repair works would be a better solution for providing a better repairs and maintenance service to residents. This would be because the scrutiny of these more itemized contracts would be far simpler and more transparent than larger, more holistic contracts covering a variety of repairs and maintenance work.

Chris (Chair) stated that it is not within SGTO's capacity to scrutinize LBS's tendering process/contractors, and that it is down to individual residents to sit on LBS's engagement boards and respond to contractor surveys when they occur.

Sharon B commented that LBS have stated at the previous resident's conference that residents be part of the procurement process. She says that LBS are inviting/have invited residents in an individual capacity to sit on these engagement boards to have a say in this process. She adds that for more local/estate specific works, that LBS procure residents from said area to have their say on the repairs/maintenance contractors.

Actions

- SGTO (Members, Board or TRA's?) will gather topics/agenda items for the group meeting with Mr Osinaike, and decide which group meeting to invite him to (April suggested).*
- SGTO (Board?) to consider and confirm Cris C's proposal for a resident-only meeting to assess SGTO's strategy at next month's (March) group meeting.*
- Joe (Staff) to produce an advert/flyer for the March group meeting and to publicise the meeting and encourage greater attendance.*
- Chris (Chair) shall sign his name on behalf of SGTO to the petition in support of the Lambeth Tenants Heat Campaign.*
- Ygerne (staff) shall send the Tenants Heat Campaign petition to our membership to allow*

TRA's to also sign it.

- *SGTO (board) to decide if SGTO should respond to the Social Housing Allocation Consultation & share it with our members. If so, the board will delegate a staff member(s) to conduct the necessary resident research to produce the response. Said staff member(s) will contact the attendees of this meeting and the wider resident community for input.*

Meeting Closed: 8:40pm

Date of next meeting: 27/03/24