



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 from Wednesday 24th April 2024 - zoom

Staff: Margaret Onwuta, Amanda Carey, Eldezangela Gomes, George Davies

Attendees: 26

1. Welcome, Introductions & Apologies

The Chair, Chris, welcomed everyone and explained the format of the meeting.

Apologies: 7

Alvey x 3, Millpond x 1, Thurlow Lodge x 1, Acorn x 1, Ahmed Kabba (staff).

2. Minutes of Group Meeting held on 28th February and Matters Arising

Minutes were agreed as a true record.

Proposed by Al-Issa Munu

Seconded by Cris Claridge

Matters arising:

Meeting with Mr Osinaike

Chris announced that the proposed intention to have Mr Osinaike at this April meeting was not possible as the March meeting was cancelled, so the opportunity to gather questions to put forward would be discussed here, and to invite him to our May meeting.

An agenda will be formed by the suggestions made and sent to Mr Osinaike prior, to allow him the opportunity to come with answers.

Suggestions on items to put forward to Mr Osinaike:

We need to know his programme and how much he is aware of what is going on within the Borough.

We ask that Mr Osinaike to produce a statement on his strategy for future engagement with tenant participation in Southwark and how he intends to set something up that is fit for purpose to rectify the failed implemented structures which would destroy the current tenant movement previously actioned by the Council.

SGTO put together some key actions, which were presented to Mr Osinaike's predecessors. We should use this format and add to where necessary and present this document to him, rather than expect him to produce such a document when he is new to the role and that these original points have already been agreed and promised by the Council. From this he can comment on what his intentions are.

A request for Mr Osinaike to share his handover notes received from his predecessors was suggested, as that would indicate what plans had been implemented, what was being worked on and needed to be continued and what was yet to be started. Chris stated that this would not be feasible to expect such notes as too personal, but instead to give direct, clear requests on what we as tenants would like to be considered for implementation, perhaps a summary of his handover notes, to know if he is going to implement them or not.

There was a request for repairs work to be signed off by a panel/tenant/leaseholder who has a list of scheduled works being done within their block/estate and can sign them off when completed and chase those that haven't. This would help to alleviate the issues where the contractors turn up with incorrect equipment and don't come back to complete as it has been ticked off as done because they attended the property. A checklist system that tenants can complete would aid in tracking works required, started, finished, missed etc.

Mr Osinaike following the resumption of his position in March and attending various meetings and having conversations so far, what would he consider as his 3 main key priorities. The tendering process for SGTO and how he values the resident engagement and the ability to challenge the Council to retain the tenants voice without the fear of losing funding.

It was suggested that training should be organised on the new housing regulation, so tenants are aware of their rights because, by law, the Council must engage with tenants and consider comments and suggestions made when preparing their revised internal processes, which is called co-implementation.

Chris confirmed that all further actions from the February meeting have been actioned.

Action: Prepare agenda for May meeting with proposed suggestions made and send with document with previously promised key action plans, with additions to Mr Osinaike.

3. Residents Participation Framework

Cris started by highlighting that because of lockdown, the tenant's movement hasn't been as active as it used to be, and many are struggling to get back out there and need assistance.

She also observed that the feeling of campaigning against the Council was met with reluctance due to the fear of losing funding.

We need to get information circulated about what is happening, what campaigns are active and for those interested, to get involved and try to encourage everyone to get engaging again.

An SGTO Conference was suggested as an opportunity to get everyone together again. The planning and organising of such should be handled by the SGTO because Many people at the last Tenants Conference organised by the council with the Council arranging tickets, many people could not get tickets as they were told tickets were sold out, but it was clear by the attendance on the day, there were many vacant places.

Chris confirmed that SGTO Conference is certainly a possibility and will be discussing and hopefully be hosted later in the year, maybe in October or November. This will be organised like the conference we hosted in 2022 at City of London Academy which was well presented with great attendance.

What will people take home from the conference, we need to get direction from the membership on items to include, not just a small group deciding on its contents. Collectively, we will get a conference suited for everyone.

The campaign committee was suggested to be reactivated with inclusive attendance from members, other than the trustees of SGTO. Chris confirmed that the boards sub-committee is active and when relevant, will open the subject to a broader committee for input and will investigate it for other areas of campaign.

Action: Chair to investigate involving members alongside the boards sub-committee in campaigns.

4. Residents' experiences with Service Charge Billing by Ina Negoita

This section was an open chat and not to be minuted.

Few points of interest to be made available:

Check your service charge fees to ensure you are only paying for the services being provided and not being charged for non-existent services, ie; window cleaning, communal aerial etc.

Damp, mould issues rejected by Council surveyor, but highlighted by independent, fight for your dwelling conditions.

Report on money wastage, scaffolding up for months for 1/2 days work, not financially viable. Possibility of creating a Tenants Scrutiny Committee, a group of tenants to scrutinise once questions are known to ask from information provided by estates.

Service charge – government and de-carbonisation emissions contract that is due to come into effect which means some buildings will be retro-fitted to reduce carbonisation and costs passed to residents.

A committee is needed to be set up to discuss these service charges to find out what we are being charged for against what we are receiving.

Action: set up service charge committee to find out what we are being charged for against what we are receiving.

5. Meet and Greet Event (TRAs Chairs and Secretaries)

Chris announced that this would be an in-person meeting with all Chairs or executives of TRAs'.

How will we consider individual availability?

This has been discussed for some time and now we are looking at arranging a meeting in getting everyone together and reaching a conclusion collectively to take forward. This way, we are all taking ownership in finding solutions in sustaining our TRAs'.

An invitation will be sent out to our membership informing of such intended meeting and if you receive, and are not the Chair, please can you ensure this information is forwarded to give the opportunity to get as many as we can together from across the whole borough to resolve issues jointly.

When is this proposed for, possible 3hrs long:

Saturday 8th June – 10-1pm, register 9.30am

Saturday 22nd June – 10-1pm, register 9.30am

It was suggested that if the Chair, vice-Chair or Secretary were not available to attend this meeting, that a representative from the TRA be allowed to attend to ensure that as many TRAs' available can be represented. This was agreed, as we need to know all strengths and weaknesses from across the borough, with as much inclusion as possible.

Action: Send invitation for Chairs and executives meeting with 2 possible dates in June, being 8th and 22nd, where the majority date will be selected.

Any Other Business

Committee

Member spoke of issues in being able to get involved and now being part of the repairs board committee, has found that there is funding available for training, which is what she has wanted to sharpen and enhance her skills, but has no idea how to claim or register for as she is not part of a TRA and is constantly pushed in that direction. A member from Tabard spoke up and said that because of the Council taking back the hall, it has been difficult to hold meetings in the area concerned, but contact has been made with the Council so a meeting can take place and the member has been invited and will be informed of when it will take place. There has been no meeting since February but hope to within the next couple of weeks.

Harold Markham, carries out regular training for each TRA role within his remit, and cannot perform personal training for those outside of a TRA, but is always very supportive.

JMB Leathermarket TMO

Representative from Bermondsey Street Residents Association spoke of how they have, with the assistance of SGTO, managed to get their last 2 years accounts signed off but this TRA is being derecognised by the JMB, as they refused to adopt the JMB constitution. There is no specific process being followed, or reason for this derecognition as they have adopted their own constitution, they are fully functional and very involved in their estate. One point taken out of the JMB constitution, was the ability for TRA members to become directors of JMB, which gives them overall power without inclusion for all members. The decision to elect new board is made by the existing board. A TRA is supposed to be independent, but they are trying to shut all this down and only accept members that are accepted by them. This is an attack on the TRA structure, and they could do this to others also.

The Chair, Chris, confirmed that this assignment is being dealt with by SGTO board and correspondence has been sent to the TRA following meetings that have been had with the JMB and the Council. JMB said that they no longer recognise BSRA because they have not

adopted the JMB model constitution. An investigation had to be carried out first on comments made, before any meeting could take place and with this being a conflict, there are rules that need to be followed on how this can be resolved.

The residents voted in the TMO to run the estates, so they are not governed by the Council, technically the TMO can do as they please as they have the residents' authority. The JMB TMO is made up of 5 TRAs', where there is conflict with 2, BSRA and Decima who fought against them building on their ball-court. Since both TRAs' have challenged the TMO, they are now both being threatened with being derecognised. TRA members have now been removed from sub-committees and a request for a copy of the MMA (Modular Management Agreement), which is the governing document between the TMO and the Council has not been forthcoming as they believe this will prove they are not compliant with governing guidance. After a year of trying to get the MMA, it has finally been shared, but only 1 page of it. A mediation meeting has been scheduled, which has taken months to achieve, however it is set for after the derecognition meeting.

Chris was under the impression, from what he had been informed, that all BSRA were invited to attend this meeting, but it was pointed out that this is not the case. It is only open to JMB members, where they have not been able to become, as the JMB select who they want to be involved and dictate who can be a director in any given year.

It has been incited that the JMB have received legal advice as they say the TRA is not complying with their constitution, but this is not being made available, a FOI needs to be requested.

The JMB should have a proper derecognition process and appeals process laid out and if not, it is not a proper procedure and the mediation is between the TMO and TRA, not the SGTO or Council.

When the TMOs' were first set up many years ago, it was expected that every TMO would have the consisting TRA representatives sitting on the board. The TRAs' must be able to have a say on how their estate is being managed and the overall performance of the TMO. Southwark Council should also be checking on the TMOs' as they are management agencies and should be reporting everything back to the council, especially on expenditure.

It was mentioned that Althea Smith had contacted the Southwark Law Centre and would be able to find out if any response has been received to date.

It was suggested that SGTO and Southwark Council write to the JMB, stating that in line with the complaints received, it would be advisable that SGTO attend this meeting.

Chris acknowledged that he will be chasing Southwark Law Centre for their guidance to ensure that SGTO are doing everything correctly and how much force can be implemented and that no tenant rights are denied, and all voices can be heard.

Action: find out if Althea has received a response from Southwark Law Centre regarding JMB TMO and BSRA issues raised.

Action: SGTO and LBS? write to JMB advising of attendance at upcoming meeting.

New staff

Chris invited the two new members of staff to speak.

George Davies introduced himself as the new Campaign and Research Officer covering maternity leave.

Eldezangela Gomes introduced herself as the new Tenants and Residents Support Officer covering the North, replacing Joe.

Meeting Closed 22:17pm

DATE OF NEXT GROUP MEETING: 22ND MAY 2024

ACTIONS

2. February Minutes – matters arising

Action: Prepare agenda for May meeting with proposed suggestions made and send with document with previously promised key action plans, with additions to Mr Osinaike.

3. Residents Participation Framework

Action: Chair to investigate involving members alongside the boards sub-committee in campaigns.

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