



OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 6 May 2014 at 7.00 pm at 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT:	Councillor Catherine Bowman (Chair) Councillor Gavin Edwards (Vice-Chair) Councillor Neil Coyle Councillor Dan Garfield Councillor David Hubber Councillor Lorraine Lauder MBE Councillor Rebecca Lury Councillor Paul Noblet Councillor The Right Revd Emmanuel Oyewole Councillor Geoffrey Thornton
OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT:	Councillor Ian Wingfield, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing Management
ALSO PRESENT:	Cris Claridge, SGTO Steve Hedger, Chair, SGTO Ian Ritchie, Tenants Fund Management Committee
OFFICER SUPPORT:	Shelley Burke, Head of Overview & Scrutiny Norman Coombe, Legal Services Stephen Douglass, Head of Community Engagemen Julie Timbrell, Scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Toby Eckersley.

2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

2.1 There were no urgent items.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2014 be agreed as a correct record.

5. CALL-IN: TENANT FUND BUDGET 2014/15 (DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING MANAGEMENT 7 APRIL 2014)

5.1 Councillor Ian Wingfield, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing Management, and Stephen Douglass, Head of Community Engagement, presented the decision. Councillor Wingfield explained that he was responsible for taking the decision and in doing so he had received advice from Officers and had placed particular weight on legal advice. He had also heard representations from Tenants' Council. Consultation had taken place over a number of months and engagement with Tenants' Council was ongoing and extensive. In addition, the views of the Housing Commission and the results of conversations with tenants and the broader community were very much taken into account. Councillor Wingfield stressed that conversations with tenants and the broader community had reinforced the council's commitment to council housing, not just now but in the future, and to building 11,000 new homes.

5.2 The Head of Community Engagement explained that the tenants' fund was a ring-fenced budget but the Southwark Group of Tenants' Organisations (SGTO) was the only organisation that did not have a grant agreement, despite being the recipient of one of the largest grants. He also explained that originally the fund had been set at a lower level but that this was increased after consultation. A Member asked at what stage the Tenants' Fund Management Committee was advised of the proposed change to the grant conditions. The Head of Community Engagement clarified that an email had been sent on 13 August 2013.

5.3 Steve Hedger, Chair of SGTO, and Ian Ritchie, Tenants' Fund Management Committee, addressed the committee. They clarified that tenants were not happy with the officer report on the Tenants' Fund and felt that there had been insufficient consultation on proposed changes. The Tenants' Fund Management Committee had referred this to Tenants' Council. Mr Hedger explained that tenants wanted the whole fund to be subject to funding agreements and also a paper setting out how this would work in practice. Tenants wanted the fund to be overseen by the Tenants' Council/Tenants' Fund Management Committee, rather than the SGTO. There were concerns about splitting of the fund and, in particular, funding being arbitrarily taken out of the hands of the management committee. There were also concerns about the general process. In the past the aim had always been to reach a unanimous decision on any changes.

- 5.4 A member of the committee referred to discussions at the meeting of Tenants' Council on 3 March 2014 and the status of the budget. Mr Hedger emphasised that it was not in the gift of the SGTO to sign this agreement but in the gift of Tenants' Council. Another member questioned whether there could be any risk of this funding being seen as funding political campaigns. Mr Ritchie responded that the SGTO was careful not to be political and the advice of council officers was sought on this. Part of its work was to target people who were vulnerable over matters such as the bedroom tax.
- 5.5 Mr Hedger stressed that tenants were concerned about how the proposed changes would work, about how the SGTO and the council would decide the outcomes for the grant funding and about how Tenants' Council would make its input. Tenants wanted more time to consider the process and the standard grant conditions. Tenants were angry that reports had come with little notice and taken up a lot of tenants' time. A main concern was the impact on the relationship between SGTO and tenants' Council and tenants would like to see a standard approach to grant funding.
- 5.6 Cris Claridge, SGTO, was concerned that unless SGTO agreed to the new conditions it would not receive its grant, which would impact on the five staff it employed. Ian Ritchie asked whether there was any procedure to receive an interim payment as no funding had been received for two months. The head of Community Engagement clarified that payments were now made in advance rather than in arrears.
- 5.7 The Deputy Leader reassured the tenant representatives that the council was happy to continue working with tenants to clarify the new procedure.
- 5.8 The members of the committee considered the evidence received from the Deputy Leader, Head of Community Engagement and tenant representatives.

RESOLVED:

1. That the decision not be referred back to the cabinet member.
2. That it be noted that the cabinet member and relevant officers agreed to meet representatives of Tenants' Council and the Tenant Fund Management Committee within the next week to establish whether a mutually agreed position can be reached on the future governance of the tenants fund budget.