



SOUTHWARK GROUP of Tenants Organisations

Tenants Engagement Review Scrutiny Report from SGTO

11th June, 2017

This is an extract from the 126 pages review. This section is specifically about SGTO and our worth as an organisation.

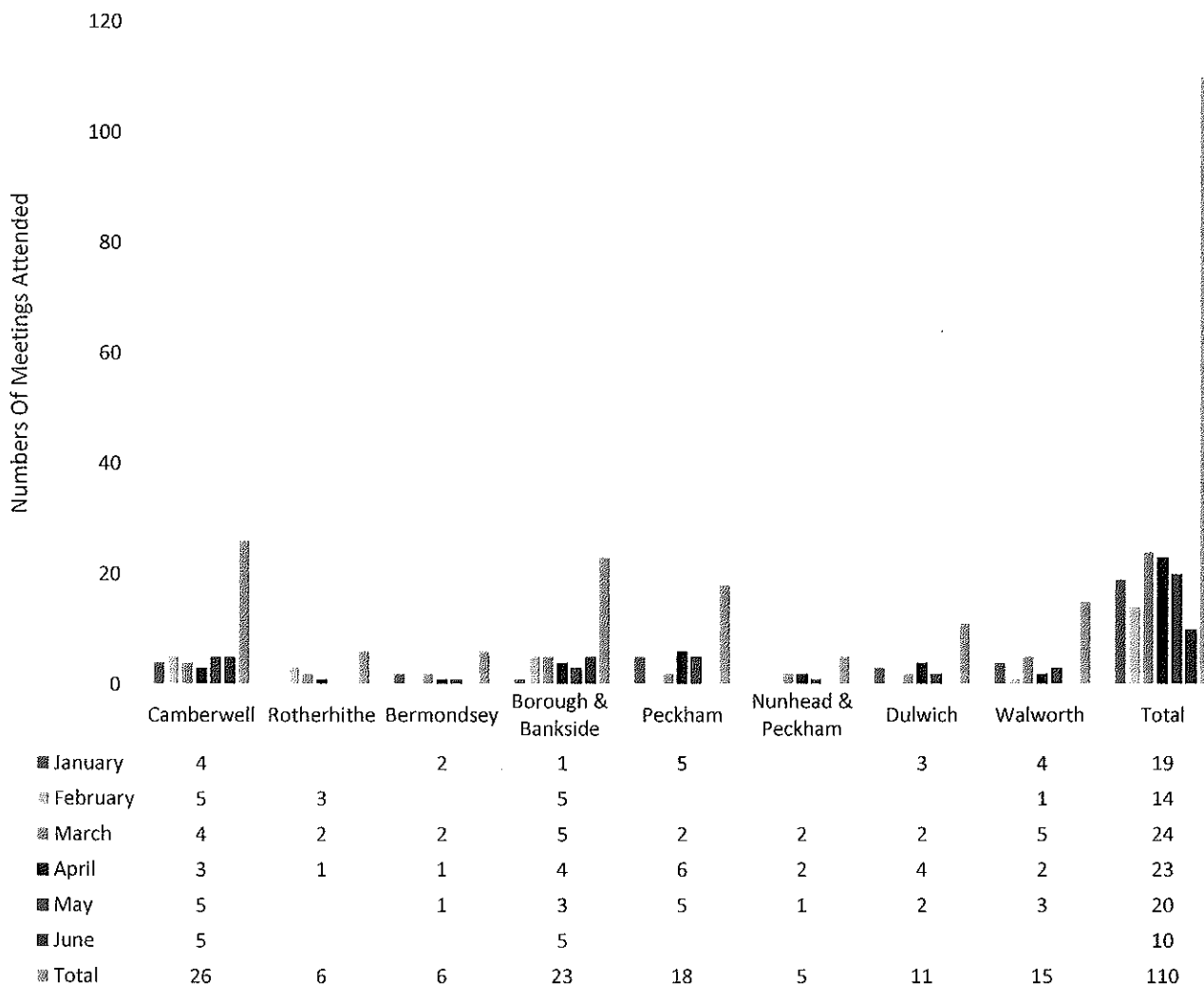
1. SGTO employs five staff. It is not clear from our research whether or not this represents good value for money.

The Council recognises and respects the independence and values of the third sector but also has a responsibility to ensure that organisations which receive funding continue to achieve certain levels of effective management and financial practices and use the funding they receive for the purposes it was granted. The Conditions of Grant Funding sets out the broad framework and requirements and what may happen if they are not met.

2. Evidence of impact is extremely limited and awareness among tenants is low.

The staff team is small, but despite the size we ensure that our tenants and residents officers are physically present across the borough. We build links amongst TRAs and other voluntary and statutory organisations in Southwark. The SGTO is an important and integral part of the community of Southwark. We have officers providing support in Rotherhithe and Camberwell, Borough & Bankside & Bermondsey, as well as the South, covering Walworth, Peckham, Nunhead and Peckham Rye and Dulwich, with increasing participation in TRAs and wider tenants movement, capacity building, information, support and guidance on relevant matters.

TRA MEETINGS ATTENDED BOROUGHWIDE JANUARY – JUNE 2017



3. There is evidence of duplication with organisations with overlapping or related interests.

It is not clear how these organisations offer similar services to the SGTO. TPAS is a commercial organisation that provides training and advice on improving consultation. The National Tenants Organisation is an umbrella body that contains TPAS. Civic Voice is similarly a national umbrella organisation for civil society groups that makes 'places more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive' and has no clear comparison with the SGTOs services whatsoever.

4. Whilst there are advantages to locally operating support providers, it is not clear that all the functions and activities which SGTO undertake are necessarily better able to deliver improved outcomes.

My team are very committed to their role as well as using its varied skills and experiences in working with our members and stakeholders. The SGTO is well known for verifying TRA accounts free of charge as part of our services, for which TRAs are greatly appreciative as it saves them a lot of money. Various equipment's are also made available for hirer to aid tenants events as and when needed provided it is available.

TRA Accounts Verification

Month	Borough Wide
January	5
February	5
March	5
April	5
May	5
June	5
Total	30

Note: Total number of accounts verified for TRAs between January and June 2017, is 30, saving the TRAs a total of £10,500 with the consideration that accountants charges £350 per account.

SGTO represents tenants' interests on a number of Council Committees in the Borough and other external tenants' bodies and groups. This is to ensure that TRAs are advised and supported in local decision making processes and enhance cohesiveness needed to achieve result.

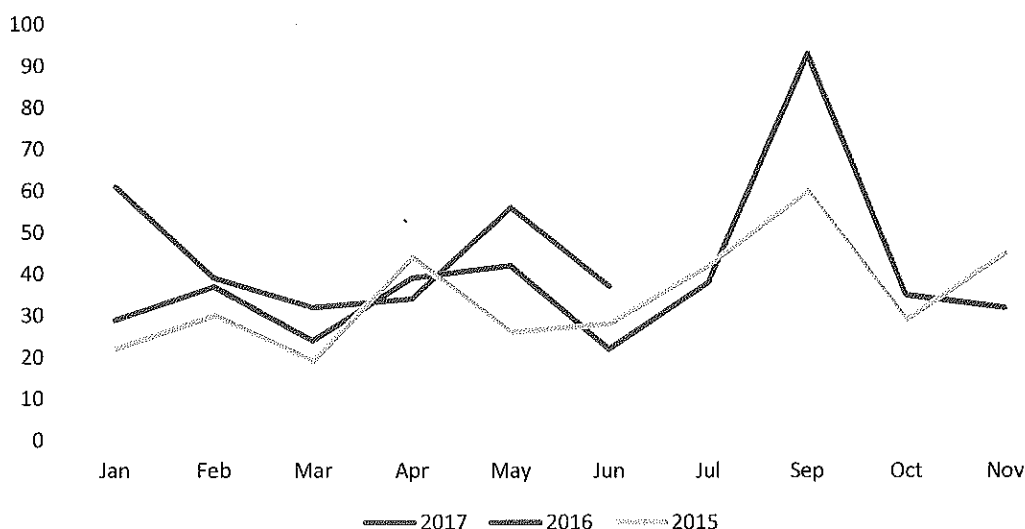
The SGTO also supports tenants and residents by acting as a campaigning organisation, both on local and national issues. For example, the SGTO recently worked alongside local councillors and MPs to campaign against the Housing and Planning Act 2016, and produced evidence to illustrate tenant's opposition to the 'pay to stay' provisions of the Act, which were later dropped.

Locally, the SGTO has coordinated campaigns around issues from housing management and disrepair to the provision of youth and mental health services in Southwark. Through the promotion and dissemination of consultations the SGTO also fights to ensure that tenants and residents' voices are heard in local decision making.

Our Campaign and Research team are always on hand to ensure that Council tenants in Southwark are informed about government policies and its implications. This is in conjunction with developing Campaign's positions on areas of government policy relevant to social housing. We carry out consultations and surveys with tenants on topical issues and satisfaction levels with housing services so as to provide evidence based support.

SGTO monthly meetings allow TRAs delegates to facilitate discussion and interaction in a face-to-face manner. It provides a platform for delegates to network and share common problems in a manner that allows for brainstorming towards achieving common goals.

SGTO Group Meeting Attendance



SGTO monthly newsletter is another platform that creates an impact and awareness amongst tenants groups in the Borough. The focus is on housing related information, national housing policies affecting tenants locally and general information provided to empower tenants and residents on Council estates in their dealings with the Council.

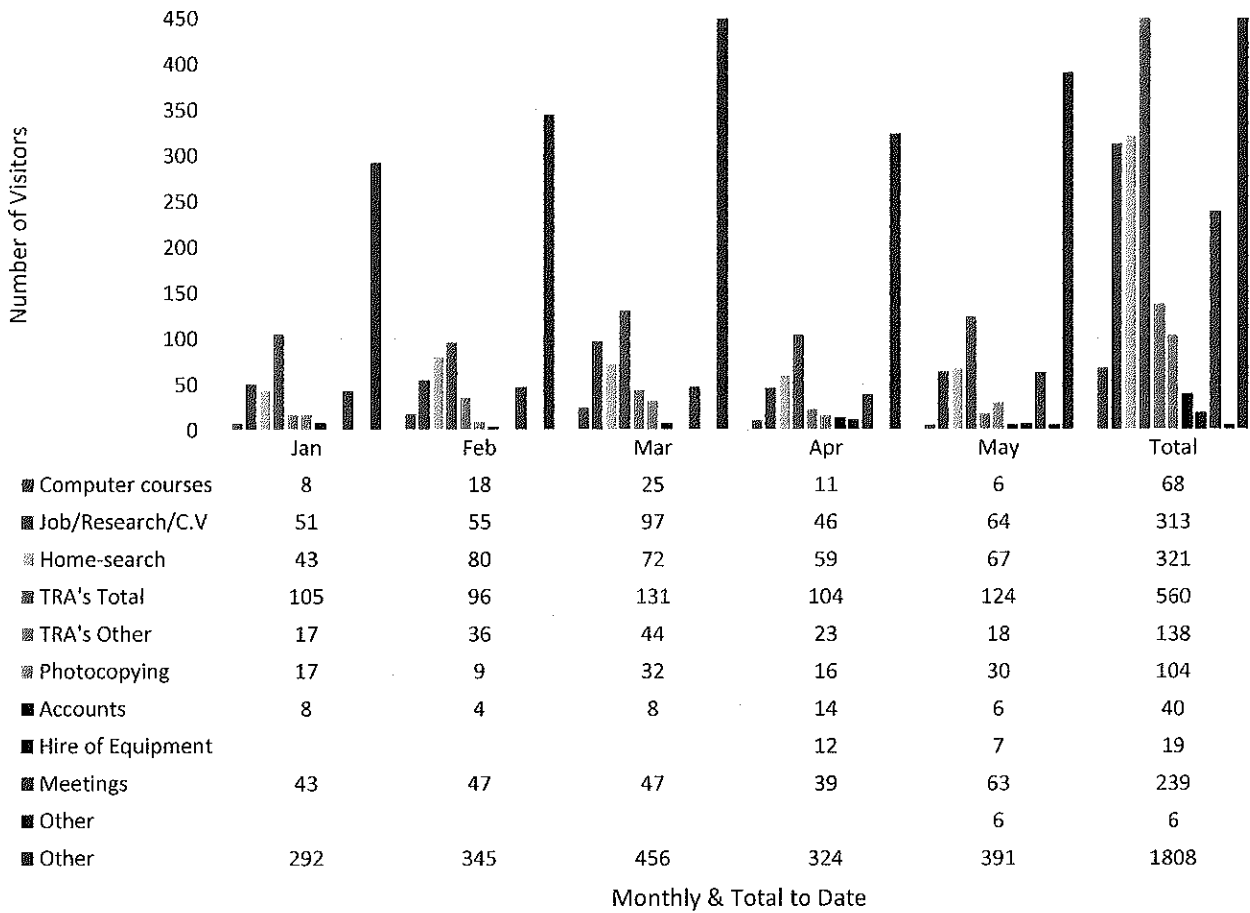
5. There also appears to be an overlap between SGTO and Council support staff – particularly in the provision of training support to tenants. SGTO offers a range of training services which are in addition to two Community Training Officers in the Council’s Tenant & Homeowner Involvement Team which are funded through an allocation from the Tenant Fund budget. Whilst there are potential benefits to having an independent source of support for tenants, it is not clear whether there is any particular benefit accrued from the current arrangements, particularly in the provision of supporting training.

Tenants using the SGTO for training opportunities have expressed that they prefer the less formal environment of the Community Centre and that they are more comfortable than when using Council or government services such as the library or jobcentre. Over the past years we have expanded our training range to incorporate accredited training programs and relevant capacity building courses that would benefit Council tenants and residents in the Borough. Some of the trainings currently on offer are as follows:

- *Basic IT skills through Learn My Way programme with Entry level 3 qualification*
- *Customer Service – Online*
- *English Functional Skills – online*
- *First Aid (Awareness) –online*
- *Health and Safety – online*
- *Fire Safety – online*
- *Food & Hygiene, level 2*

The aim of these courses is to support our tenants and residents in meeting their compliance requirements and achieve independence through training.

SGTO Visitors Jan-May 2017



- Computer courses ■ Job/Research/C.V ■ Home-search ■ TRA's Total
- TRA's Other ■ Photocopying ■ Accounts ■ Hire of Equipment
- Meetings ■ Other ■ Other

With regards to the provision of supported training, the SGTO recently applied for a grant funding of £1,500 towards financial inclusion specialist Network, in partnership with Lloyds Bank Group. This is an opportunity to enhance the work we are already doing through our resource room, engaging and supporting people to complete financial inclusion courses on Learn My Way: Keeping your personal information secure online, online and mobile banking and make money work. This is towards supporting individuals in the community to develop their digital and financial literacy skills. I am delighted to inform you that the application has been successful and the feedback from Good Things Foundation regarding the funding was that the standard of applications was very high. The programme time frame: 1st June 2017 - 31st December 2017.

The SGTO is also working in partnership with the London Institute of Banking & Finance to prepare our tenants and residents for life in modern Britain. "Lessons in Financial Education" (LIFE) is aimed at enhancing the financial skills and capability in the wider community. Lessons in Financial Education (LIFE) is an online self-study programme that provides learners with a strong basic understanding of money and finance, and develops their confidence and capability in managing their own money.

The course requires minimal supervision and will be run initially from Bells Gardens Community Centre with the possibility of being rolled out to digital hubs, TRA's and other community organisations. The course costs £10 per user plus another £10 to take an exam at the end of the course. Successful completion of the course and exam will earn the learner a level 1 qualification from the London Institute of Banking and Finance, a recognised university provider.

A bid was submitted to TFMC for £2000 to run a pilot on the LIFE course for 100 learners (£20 per head) from April to October. Another £3000 will be funded if the pilot proves successful to run the programme on an ongoing basis. The SGTO resource center will be the registered center where learners can enroll and access the course. While the course can be completed independently, staff will always be on hand to provide any necessary supervision and guidance.

6. A far greater emphasis on outcomes – rather than outputs – would improve the ability to determine whether funds were delivering improvements that represented value for money. Addressing apparent duplication in services within SGTO (and Council staff) to ensure funds were being spent as effective as possible.

There is no mention of the various key services which the SGTO offers to all the TRAs in the whole of Southwark, such as free printing, photocopying, equipment's hire, account verification and more. It should also be mentioned that the SGTO supports the provision of services which have seemingly been discontinued by the Council, namely HomeSearch and bidding support. There is also no mention of the SGTO's role as a Campaigning Organisation and the role it plays in increasing residents input in local decision-making by providing policy information and research to tenants and residents.

