

## Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission

Interim MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission held on Monday 20 February 2023 at 7.00 pm at 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH

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**PRESENT:** Councillor Margy Newens (Chair)  
Councillor Graham Neale  
Councillor Emily Hickson  
Councillor Sarah King  
Councillor Reginald Popoola  
Councillor David Watson  
Shalaka Laxman

**OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councillor Darren Merrill, Cabinet Member for Council Homes and Homelessness  
Councillor James McAsh, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Sustainable Development  
Councillor Natasha Ennin, Deputy Cabinet Member for Diversity

**OFFICER SUPPORT:** Chris Page, Climate Change and Sustainability Director  
Rebecca Towers, Programme Director  
Nat Stevens, Resident Involvement Manager  
John McCormack, Tenant and Homeowner Involvement Team Leader  
Tom Vosper, Strategic Project Manager  
David Hodgson, Director of Asset Management  
Juliet Seymour, Planning Policy Manager  
Julie Timbrell, scrutiny Project Manager

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Ketzia Harper and Lydia Marsden.

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

There were none.

### **3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

There were none.

### **4. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2023 were deferred to the following meeting.

### **5. WE WALWORTH**

Rebecca Towers, Programme Director, will presented, with Richard Galpin, Pembroke House.

### **6. CLIMATE EMERGENCY CITIZENS JURY**

Chris Page, Climate Change and Sustainability Director, presented on the Citizens Jury, with a focus on the community engagement process.

### **7. RESIDENT PARTICIPATION FRAMEWORK**

The chair opened the meeting by explaining this item is a mini review on the Resident Participation Framework. The February 2020 Cabinet report on the Southwark Resident Participation Framework is enclosed as background as this was when the arrangements last changed.

John McCormack, Tenant and Homeowner Involvement Team Leader, provided a presentation virtually, enclosed with the papers, addressing three main areas:

- Update on implementation of the Resident Participation Framework,
- Impact of the Regulatory Code on participation and the framework,
- What good practice in resident participation looks like.

Nat Stevens, Resident Involvement Manager joined in person. He said the service has some award winning work engaging the community.

The chair then invited the following housing stakeholders to present and contribute:

- Cris Claridge, Tenants Forum, accompanied by Althea Smith, joint Chair of Tenants Forum, Chris Meregini, SGTO Chair and Dario Blake, SGTO Vice

Chair.

- Ina Negoita, Homeowners Forum

The chair explained that Bassey Bassey, Southwark TMO scrutiny representative sent his apologies as he was unable to attend this evening, but he had met with her and the scrutiny Project Manager prior to the meeting.

Ina Negoita, Homeowners Forum scrutiny representative, said that the background to the Cabinet decision and report in February 2020 to change Resident Participation Framework was the Kaizen report, which found that relationships were broken between officers and tenants. Following this there were 14 meetings to co-design a new participation structure. Some resident stakeholder groups did not attend because they did not have faith in the process, however the homeowners/ leaseholders representatives did attend, but with perception that the outcome was predetermined. Towards the end of this process a paper was presented with options agreed through the co-design process, but these were significantly changed by cabinet lead member.

The chair urged a focus on how to change the current participation framework going forward. In response the Homeowners Forum representative said that in her opinion the local area forums are not working, because either officers do not attend or provide long papers, with limited input into the agenda by residents.

Cris Claridge, Tenants Forum scrutiny representative: said that the previous tenant participation structure, in her view, needed to be adapted to encourage more engagement. However the combination of the changes made by Cabinet in early 2020 and the pandemic has left engagement decimated She said that SGTO did recognise that people wanted digital engagement and that it was right to consider how to enable engagement from those places without a TRA, as they were not included in the previous structure . However she said that SGTO and housing resident representatives wanted help with solving these issues, which was not forthcoming. Her preference would be to look at the old framework and enable us get it working once again, with more support to enable greater participation.

Tenants Forum representative added that she did not welcome the proposal for financial reimbursement from central government as this feels like a devaluation of the voluntary dedication to the work of Tennant engagement, which in some cases is a lifetime's work.

She went on to identify that that the resident participation structures are no longer representative, whereas previously there was a delegate structure with TRA representatives attending forum meetings on behalf of their local area. She spoke of the difficulty in holding large meetings that are open to all.

Althea Smith, joint Chair of Tenants Forum made the following points:

- There is a concern about consultants, and those no longer living in social housing, making decisions on behalf of those living in social housing.

- Southwark has a strong tenant's movement which is training nationwide.
- The previous structure had a representative and delegate structure. This meant there was a process in place to review rent proposals with the council through negotiation, utilising advice where needed.
- Tenants pay towards the existing tenants' structure, with a precept on rent.
- SGTO and residents previously, and currently, want to revise the participation structure with the council together, not via consultants, but very much with tenants, for example through a day's conference.
- The Tenant Forum co-chair emphasised that they would like to go back to old system and then see what needs to be amended and modernised.

The chair thanked the representatives, remarking that while the history is important to understand she encouraged looking forward, remaining focused constructive solutions and not throwing the baby out of the bathwater.

She also noted that in order to plan this session and mini review in collaboration with the housing stakeholder scrutiny representatives there had been attempts to organise a meeting in advance, and part of this was to understand the history and key issues. The SGTO representatives acknowledged this and said that that while they had been unable to do this previously they would like to find a time to meet. Both the Homeowners Forum and Tenant Forum representative said that in their view the Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Commission (where they are co-optees) would have been more appropriate to conduct the review given the importance of participation to the delivery of housing services. The representatives highlighted that recently the housing participation team had moved out of Community Engagement unit and joined the Housing department. A member asked about rationale for this Commission conducting the review. Head of Scrutiny explained that previously the cabinet member for Community Engagement had led on the Framework, and the chair explained that this year Community Engagement function had moved to the Environment Commission, whereas previously it had been with Housing. There had been an internal discussion amongst scrutiny chairs about the best place to conduct the review. Largely to balance workloads the Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission had picked up the work rather than the Housing and Community Engagement Commission [the latter part of this discussion happened under the work programme items but is recorded here for clarity].

The chair then welcomed invited Cllr Natasha Ennin, Deputy Cabinet Member for Diversity, to contribute, with a focus on her work on broadening diversity. She was joined by the following TRA representatives:

- Melvin M Kanu (Alberta TRA)
- Harry Matthews (Thurlow Lodge TRA)

- Kudirat Olamide Balogun (Brandon 1 TRA)
- Sheila Benjamin (Brandon 3)

Cllr Natasha Ennin, Deputy Cabinet Member for Diversity said that she had been engaging with the wider community of residents , including some of those who were not aware of if the previous structure . She explained that the TRAs here today are present to enable the Commission to hear from diverse groups. She added that some TRAs and engagement structures have not got demographic data so the council do not always know the diversity of resident participation.

The TRA representatives then made the following points:

- Brandon TRA work to ensure younger and older people are engaged. This is done in the local estates on the ground. The TRA are also providing avenues to meet staff, including John and Nat who contributed earlier.
- Alberta have a WhatsApp group where the TRA try and ensure that more people are engaged.
- Brandon work with community groups to put on activities and activities to engage residents. There are language barriers. There had a recent meeting on heating but with a no show from officers, which is not acceptable. The TRA would like to see the council officers come out and welcomed Nat's work here.

Councillor Darren Merrill, Cabinet Member for Council Homes and Homelessness commented that while there has been some great work in the past and some really good practice currently, he is not going to pretend it is perfect, adding the Framework has had difficulties and welcomed the Deputy Cabinet member's outreach work on this.

The Deputy Member for Diversity said that her work with TRA and residents was with a focus on getting a broader demographic of people involved. Through the course of this she had discovered that there were problems with the old system, particularly involving younger people and more diverse ethnicity. Her engagement work has been looking at how to develop a co-design framework.

The chair then invited further comments and questions:

The SGTO representative said that they are doing their best to diversity and indicated the ethnic diversity of people in attendance from SGTO. The SGTO vice chair spoke about community engagement work including a meeting with young people formally involved with criminal justice - who now want to give back. They cook and provide this to the community. Many are from the Romanian community. SGTO also support and advocate for them with the police.

SGTO representative said as well as community engagement another very important function is advocating to improve cleaning , repairs , but that is going by

the by wayside. In SGTO said there is a failing repairs service and commented that the opportunity to improve this function, and work with the council to address this, is not there any longer.

The Homeowners Representative said that the council is good at producing papers, but then papers are not followed, including the terms of references. She would like to see this addressed. She also said that previous participation structure enabled representatives to influence council papers, but this is no longer possible and she would also like this addressed.

SGTO said they would like a better understanding of officer roles and who to raise problems with on matters such as repairs.

The Deputy Cabinet said her role is to enable participation and scrutiny by residents from a diverse background.

SGTO said that they spend a lot of time consulting with residents but see no outcome and impact, and they would like to see improvements in this area.

The TRA representatives said that they would like to see the council make it easier to apply and manage a grant. Although the grant was awarded the money did not arrive until too late. The grant evaluation took 40 hours, which is a barrier, along with the lack of Plain English explanation. There are too many barriers.

Members noted the contrast and gap between earlier presentations of community engagement going well and the more strained relationships and concerning situation here.

The housing representatives said to undertake a review such as this more time is needed and suggested a day was set aside. Members also indicated more time might well be needed.

The Resident Involvement Manager said all officers are required to meet a 100 residents. The team are also co creating with event with TRA, with each officer holding four events as a way to we get better relationships and better understanding.

Officers noted that the Regulator is looking for co-creation as part of the Tenant Empowerment and Involvement Standards, and the introduction of regulation for councils. There is a window of opportunity here to revisit the Framework.

Nat Stevens, Resident Involvement Manager, reported that the Housing Quality Network has been invited to look at where we are now and where the participation framework needs to go.

## **8. REVIEW: FINANCING AND RESOURCING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY PLAN - OFFICER BRIEFING**

The following officers presented and took questions:

- Chris Page, Climate Change and Sustainability Director (in person)
- Tom Vosper, Strategic Project Manager (virtually)
- David Hodgson, Director of Asset Management (virtually)
- Juliet Seymour, Planning Policy Manager (virtually)

**9. INTERVIEW: CABINET MEMBER CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The commission interviewed Councillor James McAsh, who is providing maternity cover for Cllr Helen Dennis, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Sustainable Development.

**10. WORK PROGRAMME**