

SCRUTINY OF TRA COMMUNITY HALLS AND COMMUNAL ROOMS – JANUARY 2013

Response on behalf of the Tenants Halls Working Party To the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on 25th February 2013.

- (a) Cllr Gavin Edwards (Chair of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee) attended the meeting of the Tenants' Halls Working Party on Thursday 12th February 2013 to discuss the report.
- (b) It was agreed that the Tenants' Hall Working Party would consider and respond to the Conclusions and Recommendations set out in pages 31 to 33 of the report. The responses are set out below.

1. TRA Community Hall data held by the Council

The Working Party would agree in general with the conclusions set out under this heading. Some additional information has been collated as a result of condition surveys and plans to carry out works of improvement. We need to review the data we have collected and develop a way of obtaining and analysing activities and hall use which we do not at this stage hold. It is anticipated that in the first instance we will circulate a questionnaire seeking relevant information.

2. Advertising Training

The Tenants Fund Management Committee in conjunction with the SGTO and the Tenants Halls Working Party are working on a comprehensive programme of T&RA Training and to look at appropriate in house and external providers. It is anticipated that this training will be funded by the Tenants' Fund.

Advertising of training and courses will be carried through the internal information circulated by the Community Engagement section, the Tenants Council, Area Forums, the SGTO Web site and newly re-launched SGTO newsletter,

3. Composite Courses

We note the point about the number of courses, twenty two, and it may be possible for some consolidation. However, these courses do not all come from a single provider and making changes is not within the overall gift of the Tenants Halls Working Party. We do, and will continue to work closely with the Tenants' Fund Management Committee who we can report is working to draw up a comprehensive list of training needs of Tenants & Residents Associations. It is anticipated they will also fund the training. The SGTO also provides a number of training courses which include first aid, food safety and computer skills.

The Tenants Halls Working Party has identified the following courses.

Already in place

Basic Committee Skills)

- | | | |
|--------------|-----|---|
| a) Chair |) - | Already provided and funded through the TFMC. |
| b) Secretary |) - | The TFMC funds two training officers |
| c) Treasurer |) - | |

- | | | |
|--------------|-----|--|
| Food Hygiene |) - | Provided by the SGTO up to certification level |
| First Aid |) - | |

Computer Skills) -

To be organised

Health & Safety

Risk Assessment

Fire Safety

Insurance Requirements

(a) Public Liability

(b) Activities and Events

Legal Liabilities and Licences

Financial Management and Hiring Guidelines.

4. Training Feedback

The Tenants' Halls Working Party agrees and supports this recommendation. The Working Party will review this in detail with officers.

It should be noted that the Tenants Council and its sub committees are looking at overall training requirements for the Tenants Movement in Southwark.

5. Tenancy Agreements

The Tenants Halls Working Party concurs with this recommendation and we are currently reviewing the appropriate licensing arrangements. We also note the Sub- committee's preference for a 'Tenancy at Will' arrangement and we note this.

It is essential before we conclude our deliberations that we advise on the legal implications and the duties and implications of the licences that are to be agreed.

6. A fair rent system

We note the comments of the Housing Strategy Sub Committee and will consider rent levels and tenancies at our next meeting. We note the matrix as a working tool and we are aware that we need to develop a charging policy that is sustainable year on year rather than one that has to be adjusted 'year on year' based on income generation.

7. Provision across the Borough

See '1' above - once we have discovered the use and occupation of all the premises after which we can do a detailed demographic assessment of service provision and targeting. We see a considerable role for Community Engagement in identifying demand and matching it to provision.

We are aware of the need to maximise use and to assist in creating more equitable access in areas of scarce provision.

8. Advertising the information to boost involvement and use of halls

The Working Party notes the comments and takes the view that we support the need to provide more accessible information. The recommendation that TRAs provide a quarterly newsletter is noted however this comes with a resource implication. It is clearly easier

for some TRAs than others to provide regular newsletters and this is also very much a training and support issue for the Council and the wider Tenants Movement. We note the recommendation that new tenants should receive information on tenant halls and activities. This should also include details of the TRA and should be provided by the Housing Department at the time of sign up.

We need to look at how events, activities, use and access, are publicised. We may need a considerable level of support from the Council to do this. In the meantime we know of one TRA that has its own website, twitter, and facebook.

9. TRA halls where there is acute under-use

We need to examine which community premises fall within this recommendation. We have agreed with officers that they will provide a report to the Tenants Halls Working party. It would also be of help if elected members could feed into this information.

10. Defunct TRAs

We would concur with this suggestion with some reservations and would want to see if the defunct TRAs can be reconstituted and assisted to become active again. We are also conscious that once a community premises is converted it is lost to community use forever.

We are also acutely aware of the shortage of social housing in Southwark and would not support premises that can reasonably be converted or the site redeveloped standing empty and unused for a long period of time.

11. Stock condition

The Working Party has approached this spend with great care to ensure that any money spent is appropriate and in accordance with 'best value'. The first tranche of funding is in programme as we have started work to identify the second tranche.

Key members of the Working Party and Officers hold regular update discussions to ensure we maximise the value of the work undertaken.

The Working Party and the Officers take a detailed and considered view on all the work to be considered and this includes DDA compliance, health and safety, and fire safety before coming to a final decision and agreeing the upgrading.

The proximity of premises to each other does not necessarily indicate demand or over provision and we would need a detailed review of the activities undertaken in each facility and whether they could reasonably be relocated to another venue. We are aware of the sensitivity of this as an issue.

12. Whistle blowing procedure

We see this suggestion as two separate issues.

(a) Fraud and misappropriation of money and property.

We see it as appropriate that this be dealt with initially by the council Anti-fraud team. (b)Matters of bad behaviour, bullying, racism and other serious breaches of the recognition agreement should be dealt with initially by the TRA with officer support and when necessary by Tenants Council; and where appropriate with support and advice from the SGTO.

We are aware that this is a wider issue and possibly outside the Terms of Reference of the Tenants Hall Working Party other where it relates to the use and occupation of community premises.

In general terms we recommend that both issues need to be dealt with quickly as they occur. We are aware and concerned by the long delays that have occurred in the past in dealing with some difficult and sensitive issues and the effect they have had on the community and the reputation of the TRA and, in some instances, the Council.

(b) Multiple key holders

We note and support this recommendation. We understand that a single key holder situation is the exception rather than the rule.

This can form part of a condition of the licence to occupy.

We also see it as a necessary requirement that the Council maintains an updated list of key holders. This is particularly essential when dealing with emergency evacuation of numbers of residents where immediate care and shelter is required.

(c) Multi signature withdrawals

It is a condition of recognition that TRA cheques are validated by more than one signature and it is usual practice to have three signatories, (any two to sign). It is usual practice for banks to insist on multi-signatories for TRA accounts.

The SGTO verifies a considerable number of TRA accounts annually and has not identified an instance of single signatory accounts.

Licensed Premises

The Tenants Halls Working Party is aware that there is little or no demand or applications for new licences. As a general rule we do not support the use of community premises as quasi drinking clubs. We have over a great number of years encountered some serious difficulties around the issue of licensed premises.

We are aware that there are currently three halls holding a licence to sell alcohol.

If there are further issues arising from these responses we will be happy to address them at the meeting on 29th February 2013.

Ian Ritchie
Chair

Carol Vincent
Vice Chair

On behalf of the Tenants Hall Working Party