



Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations

Bells Gardens Community Centre,
19 Buller Close, London,

Campaigning for Housing Rights and Council Homes

SE15 6UJ

Scrutiny report back on new resident involvement structures 28.01.21

A statement from the Chair of SGTO, Cris Claridge:

The Council decided to close the existing participation structures at almost the same time as the council was announcing ways it would cope with the government announced lockdown. This closed down an organised system of communication and community support without having any system in place to coordinate community support in its place.

Did the Director of communities inform the Council of the possible risks of closing down the existing lines of communication without a viable one to take its place?

It has been difficult to evidence that the regular ring around actually happening.

The experience of my T&RA is that the reverse is true and that sources of information and communication no longer exist.

How will the Resident Involvement Team report on their success or failure in common with other parts of the council and organisations funded by public funds. Will their KPIs be reported for public scrutiny?

Who is responsible for monitoring and reporting on them at present?

Residents were expecting to respond to a written report from the Southwark resident engagement team. The Southwark Council engagement officers report was circulated at 10pm on the 26.01.21 and we have compiled the below comments based on feedback received:

Engagement with tenants and residents is not just about honouring a legal duty to consult

Listening to the voices of tenants and residents is vital in understanding what is happening on the ground and how decisions impact people living in Southwark owned properties. Previously there were opportunities to raise housing issues within a TRA, Area Housing Forums, Tenant Council and Homeowner Council. The reduction in these forums has reduced opportunity to raise housing issues and influence important decisions as per the Housing Act 1985.

Equalities data gathered

Information is given when registering for housing forums on disabilities, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation – how has this information been used to improve your service?

Some of the information requested is extremely intrusive and gives the council personal information about individuals; why it is needed?

People being muted during discussions

North West Housing Forum reported attendees were muted during the forum and unable to speak. Muting was explained as a technical issue. There was strong community involvement at this meeting. Community reps were able to put signs up to have their voices heard.

Report back after meetings

There are no minutes of meetings. There is no record of the discussion at the meetings.

Has recording the meetings been explored for those unable to attend, with permission of attendees?
If on 'speaker view' this would protect identities.

Tenants and residents unable to discuss the issue because 'Chat' is disabled during the presentations

Translators, signers and auto-transcribe are not advertised as being available

We know from our own meetings that people who rely on hearing aids struggle to engage with Zoom. We are pleased that the council will provide translators, auto transcribe and signers on request - are people aware that translators, signers and auto-transcribe is available to them during these meetings?

Can this be part of the marketing material for these meetings, so they are inclusive.

Staff unable to manage the meetings

Tenants and residents are giving their evening to attend these meetings and are frustrated to experience technical issues such as chat being disabled, and people being muted.

Officers need to be upskilled in how to manage the meetings inclusively. Hopefully use of signers and translators can be utilised and officers able to arrange and manage this as part of the meetings if requested.

Advertising of Local Housing Forums

Tenants and residents having to register for each meeting separately causes a barrier and meetings missed.

Tenants have received invites to the wrong area meetings.

Meetings should be advertised in printed news such as Southwark News to increase attendee numbers and allow people who don't access internet to connect with these meetings.

Digital access

Southwark Council highlighted on the 21.01.21 in their campaign launch to get 'Learners Laptops' that there is a digital divide in Southwark and not everyone has access to internet or equipment to access internet. This also affects tenants and their ability to engage with their landlord and engagement structures. Libraries and community spaces that lots of people use to access internet are currently closed.

We welcome the update that Zoom meetings can now be accessed via a telephone line. Was this option available during elections and previous online forums?

The latest round of forums in March there is only online registration.



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How many people have attended these meetings?

The scrutiny report from the Southwark Council engagement team doesn't state how many people attended the forums. Is there a quorum for these meetings?

We have evidence of low turnout for these meetings, an attendee of South Forum told us there were 9 residents with a majority of leaseholder representation. Tenure information is collected in the registration process for the Zoom meetings. Can this information be presented in the Local Housing Forum records along with session agendas, presentations etc to ensure there is cross tenure representation influencing the discussions?

Accessibility of documents

North West Forum attendees couldn't access documents and were told agendas were on webpage but checked and could not locate them.

Surveys used during the meetings

The North West forum refused to complete these as they should not constitute consultation. Did any other forums?

Elections

Elections were very confused wrong statements up for wrong position.

After the elections:

People who have been elected into these roles are really keen to make the forums work for tenants and residents.

SGTO request that we continue to monitor the resident engagement structures and gather feedback for the next 18 months to aid their improvement.

Please file report as part of the agenda pack for the Resident Engagement and Housing Scrutiny agenda pack 28.01.21.