

## Q2 Sub-Regional Meetings

### Meetings held in April & May 2022

Our sub-regional meetings bring together tenant representatives to facilitate supportive and dynamic relationships across borough lines. At sub-regional meetings, tenant representatives have an opportunity to share their experiences and knowledge, and to discuss the cross-borough and housing-related issues that impact them.

LTF has established the following four networks, with tenant representatives from TRAs and tenants' groups in the listed boroughs:

- (1) Central Corridor: Camden, City of London, Haringey, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Wandsworth, Westminster
- (2) East London: Barking and Dagenham, Enfield, Greenwich, Hackney, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest
- (3) South London: Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton
- (4) West London: Barnet, Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow

### Central Corridor Meeting

This meeting built on the discussion from the first Central Corridor sub-regional meeting in February 2022 and introduced some new topics.

#### **1. Issues with Landlord Responsiveness and Tenant Engagement**

Tenant representatives raised concerns that their landlords were not responsive to the issues they have raised, and questioned whether the consultations that they had participated could even be considered the bare minimum of engagement.

One tenant representative from Camden introduced Arnstein's Ladder (Fig.1), as a guide for true tenant engagement, noting, 'you're either up there [in Degrees of Citizen Power], and you can really get involved and you have a voice, or you're just ignored.'

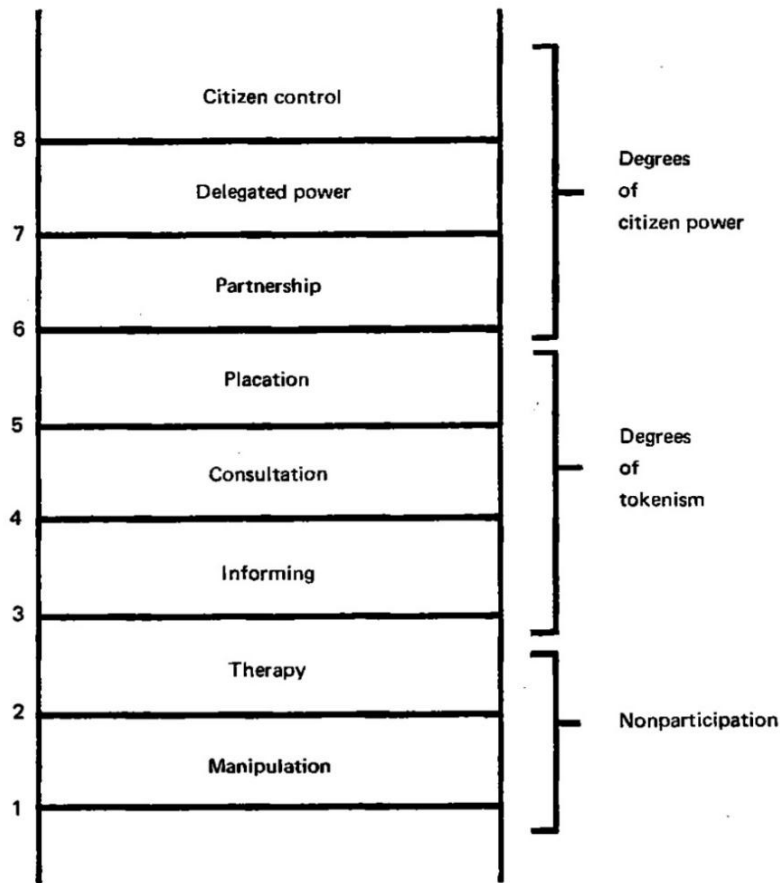


Fig. 1 - Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, developed by Sherry Arnstein in 1969

## 2. Issues around Accessing Information

Tenant representatives also raised issues of accessing information about their homes and estates. One tenant representative, whose estate is at risk of demolition, shared how difficult it was to access information about the quality of the blocks at risk:

'We were trying to find out what evidence the Council has that the buildings have, in their view, come to the end of their useful life, as that's what they said in a report. We asked for the report that justified this. Nothing was forthcoming. I made two freedom of information requests. The only thing supplied was that - every 10 years, they carry out stock condition surveys, which include visual checks on windows, doors - that sort of thing. But not really that detailed, and nothing structural was mentioned. The building could have been falling down but, basically, they didn't have any evidence to prove whether or not they had been lying all the way through about the need to demolish them. This is obviously not just an issue for us, but probably all over London.'

### **3. Living in the Central Activities Zone and Collective Map Project**

Tenant representatives shared their thoughts on how the Mayor of London's designated Central Activities Zone (CAZ) – subject to its own supplemental planning guidance (SPG) – has impacted them as tenants.

This was part of a larger discussion relating to the project that is coming out of this sub-regional network - a collectively-produced alternative CAZ map, which highlights the parts of the region which tenants value and want to see prioritised.

As part of this map, we are identifying the housing estates in each of the Central Corridor boroughs. The map features photographs of estates taken by LTF members and tenants, themselves. It also has links to recordings from tenants.

You can also learn more about the collective mapping project and how you can get involved [here](#).

Tenants' representatives were also invited to join a project check-in during July.

In this meeting, a tenant representative raised concerns that the CAZ designation has meant that estates and neighbourhoods in other parts of the CAZ boroughs do not receive much support or focus. The collective map will help us demonstrate this, and highlight the differences between where tenants want to see investment – in social housing, in their homes, in their communities – versus where investment is now – tourist attractions, speculative real estate opportunities and business districts.

### **4. Issues with Accessibility of Public and Green Spaces**

A tenant representative from Westminster spoke about the loss of green spaces, which she felt was directly connected to the type of investment being prioritised in and around the CAZ.

Comments:

- I've noticed that when the new buildings are going up – and we're talking about corporate-style, multi-million-pound penthouses – alongside the council estate, they create little green spaces, I suppose, for people in the new buildings to enjoy.  
Additionally, a lot of the new building is concrete land: pavement and huge traffic zones. In Westminster and Kensington and areas with national parks,

which are fabulous but for people to access them, they have to go through very busy motorway crossings. It's not easy to access when you have to go through subways to reach them. It is quite a problem for older people and those with disabilities, to get to a bench to sit down, even once they are in the park.

I certainly would like to see more green spaces created for those who don't have them in their immediate vicinity. Westminster is seriously lacking any of this kind of place for people to enjoy.

- A lot of the small community parks are now locked and only accessible to the residents living around them. There was an uproar about one of them near Lancaster Gate. A millionaire bought it. If anyone wants the key to access it, they have to pay £500/year. These sorts of green spaces are really important as people haven't got enough greenery around them.

## **5. Concerns around Local Authority Development Priorities**

A Wandsworth tenants rep highlighted that the CAZ SPG is just another consideration for the boroughs in addition to their own local plans, which they spend ages consulting on, and are meant to drive local priorities and investment. It's doubly complicated and the question is what investment has it actually drawn in? The impact is that there is less to go around in the areas that might be prioritised by citizens, rather than big developers.

## **6. Alternative CAZ Mapping Project**

There was discussion on the parts of the CAZ that matter to tenants and tenants' groups, and where they would like to see investment prioritised. The alternative CAZ map includes tenants' thoughts on the areas that have received large portions of CAZ investment – e.g., Kings Cross Opportunity Area.

Generally, it was felt that this could be an issue of history. Many tenants are living in areas that are being quite heavily gentrified - so I think that mapping the places and things that are important to their communities is a big theme.

## East London Sub-regional area

Tenants from this area are focusing on the production of an Olympic Legacy Report with [sarah@londontenants.org](mailto:sarah@londontenants.org) through guidance and support from tenants' representatives engaging in the E London sub-region. Tenants from Barking and Dagenham, Greenwich, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets, and Waltham Forest, are share testimonials and thoughts about the Olympic Legacy.

This meeting built upon the discussion from the first East London sub-regional meeting and focused on the Olympic Legacy and the LLDC.

### **1. Opportunity Areas and Ongoing Development in East London**

Tenant representatives expressed their concerns about ongoing developments in their boroughs and opportunity areas, including in the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) area.

### **2. Royal Docks//Beckton Riverside:**

There was discussion about the Silvertown Tunnel project, which intends to provide a lorry route across the Thames between Newham and Greenwich:

Concern was expressed that

- it is primarily for heavy goods vehicles; there's no foot pathway or cycle path. It invites more heavy vehicles 24 hours a day. There is a massive park for HG vehicles.
- Pollution is already bad in Newham and is particularly bad in the park around Beckton and Royal Docks.
- There have been all sorts of research into these tunnels and new roads, which highlights that they don't actually cut down traffic, they just make new places for traffic to go. It's obviously for big business.'
- There has been a lack of or poor community engagement about this.
- Few people know about this (Silvertown Tunnel) project which is indicative of insufficient engagement and consultation.
- Generally local people haven't been informed about it. There's been a couple of good demonstrations, but a lot of it has been activists, greens, environmentalists and trade unionists from across London, but not that many local people. Newham Council is actually opposed to it.
- The boroughs - Newham and Greenwich should be dropping letters in everybody's houses to tell them what's coming.'

### **3. The Olympic Legacy**

As we near the tenth anniversary of the London 2012 Olympic Games, there was a reflection by tenant representatives on the growth, 'convergence' and legacy promised a decade ago.

Comments:

- We live in the tower block that had the [anti-aircraft] missiles on top of it. We went to court about this, but the judge on the case had been in the army, so it was all stitched up. We knew we weren't going to get anywhere. We felt that we were being used as guinea pigs. We said we don't want to be here if anything did happen, but they weren't having it.

There was general agreement that it would be good to condense information and research about the legacy of the Olympic Games, including the lived experiences and concerns of tenant groups, into a report for publication later this year.

Topics identified by tenant reps during the meeting were - housing delivery in the 'growth boroughs', levels of multiple deprivation, gentrification (including population turnover), employment (including job creation, loss, who the jobs are for), community spaces and facilities (including green spaces and sports pitches), public health (including fitness, health services and PE hours for young people), youth services and lack of monitoring.

*We are still gathering tenant testimonials: if you are or were a tenant in Barking and Dagenham, Greenwich, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets or Waltham Forest before, during or after the Games, and you want to share your views, please email [sarah@londontenants.org](mailto:sarah@londontenants.org) with a written testimonial or to set up a phone/Zoom interview.*

### **4. Issues with Contractors and Local Authority Landlords**

Tenant representatives at the meeting shared their experiences around the mismanagement of repairs and refurbishment works by contractors who are ultimately responsible to social landlords. A number of boroughs share contractors.

Comments:

- The contractors never suffer the consequences. I saw a window replacement in Chalk Farm (Camden). The tenants kept saying the contractors were awful, horrendous, an absolute nightmare, and they took photographic evidence which they put on the project manager's desk every day. Camden

Council, as the landlord, refused to do anything until, at the very end of the contract, when there was a big post mortem and they swore that the contractors would never work for them again.

They probably haven't, but the problem is that the contractors will just move on and work for another social landlord, also without consequences. They never go out of business.

- Our council in Waltham Forest has a relationship/contract with Morgan Sindall, who is also doing significant work in Hackney (for example, Old Street Underground and National Rail Station):

Waltham Forest has a deal with Morgan Sindall - for £135 million - to take over all their repair works in the borough on top of the contract they got to do the refurbishment works. When questioned, the Council said that they carried out a tender and Morgan Sindall got the contract. We've had four different Morgan Sindall project managers for our refurbishment work. The last one left when he saw the list of things they wanted to do on my estate.

- These organisations [local authorities and other social landlords] never learn any lessons from history. It's always a complete failure when you do that sort of thing - only using one supplier.
- Very often, tendering means that landlords choose the lowest bidder, and often, the lowest bidder is lying about how much it's actually going to cost. The second thing is that there's essentially a cartelisation of these large building firms that seem to be able to get council contracts regardless of whether they do the work well or not.

## **5. Demolition of Social Housing**

Tenant representatives shared concerns about demolition - the threat of demolition in their boroughs, outside the sub-region and across London.

- Southwark's starting point for the Heygate Estate, Elephant and Castle was demolition at any cost. They were not concerned about whether this was a good or bad deal for tenants.
- What was their view of tenants - that they were just glad to get rid of them? Is that relevant to all of us?

- Some of these housing stock problems aren't insurmountable at all. Some tower blocks have been subtly refurbished and then sold off as market homes. So, they could have been refurbished and rented as social housing. It's a question of money and priorities.

## **6. Planning issues.**

Comments:

- I spoke with some bus drivers about the removal of the Clapton Bus Garage a few years ago because its planned removal was in the Hackney Plan, but the council hadn't done anything about it. One bus driver looked at me cynically and said, 'Well it would be tidier'. That seemed to epitomise the council's view: it's better to get rid of jobs like that, or light industry, even though they might be providing an essential and useful service.
- There is a superficiality that comes into the whole question of planning. They've got rid of other places to replace with market housing.
- Some suggest that the only way a council can make money, and enough to keep itself afloat, is to sell market housing.'

## South London

### **1. Presentation by Rhi Hughes from South West London Law Centres (SWLLC)**

Rhi joined tenant representatives from the South London sub-region to speak about how law centres and legal representatives can support collective action by tenants' groups. Rhi's presentation can be viewed [on our website](#).

Key components of Rhi's presentation, 'Accessing legal support and building strong, organised social housing tenants' voices in South London', are briefly outlined below.

Rhi shared a clip from a [documentary](#) to help explain why law centres exist and what purpose they serve. Law centres provide legal aid, which Rhi defined as the provision of assistance to people who are unable to afford legal representation and access to the court system. Legal aid is viewed as key to providing access to justice by ensuring equality before the law, the right to counsel and the right to a fair trial.

Rhi explains that some recent legislation has impacted the ability of law centres and others to provide as much legal assistance as they once did. This legislation includes:



- Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LAPSO) reduced what people were entitled to under legal aid. This had major implications for tenants who have had to remain in unrepaired properties for longer because they can't get the legal advice and representation necessary to enforce their rights.
- Welfare Reform 2012

Rhi's presentation highlighted that tenant organising needs to be one weapon in our arsenal against injustice, and the law has to be another. Other important parts of organising and collective action include journalists and social media, as these can help bring attention to injustices or causes.

Law Centres can not only provide legal advice but also support tenants on the organising side, following tenants' lead. Legal aid can often kick landlords into action when they are not responding to collective tenant organising, alone. Law centres can provide support with press releases and social media.

Knowing how to access legal support:

In all cases, whether seeking to remedy an injustice yourself or as a group, you should use [EIRC](#):

- **E** – Provide: take photos, and notes, and explain how it's affecting you. Get medical evidence if it's impacting your health.
- **I** – Identify the issue and who is responsible for dealing with it.
- **R** – Report to your landlord and keep reporting it; start the complaint process if the landlord hasn't addressed the issue in a reasonable amount of time. You can go directly to the Housing Ombudsman.
- **C** – Connect with your TRA or tenants' action group.

Rhi also provided some guidance around the complaints process, advising tenants' representatives to

- write a Stage 1 complaint as early as possible. SWLLC has a table which explains the amount of time that is reasonable to wait to get something repaired
- get local ward councillors involved and reach out to newly elected ones right away as they have, in SWLLC's experience, been more responsive
- raise issues with their MPs. They might be involved in policy discussions at this higher level with regard to - social housing, funding, right to buy, etc

- submit FOI requests asking questions such as: how many repairs have been done on X estate in the last year? What are the charges for X activity (e.g., window cleaning, groundworks)
- tenants should go after information relevant to their own experiences - to make their case stronger. Once they have this information and have connected with councillors, it is much easier to push a case forward. It is important that tenant reps, or tenants who are more technologically or bureaucratically savvy support their neighbours who are less so
- petitions and deputations at council meetings can also escalate complaints.

SWLLC (and other law centres) can help tenants:

<b>On an individual basis</b> (with issues that are affecting individual tenants)	<b>On a collective basis</b> (with issues that are affecting multiple tenants)
<p>Emergency advice and representation at court for possession cases (eviction)</p> <p>Eviction and possession proceedings (for your rented home), including notices served by your landlord; for example, counterclaims</p> <p>Homelessness</p> <p>Succession for tenants when the person you live with has died</p> <p>Unlawful eviction</p> <p>Lack of help from the council when you go to them for support, for whatever reason</p> <p>If your landlord has applied to County Court for an injunction against you, for example for bad behaviour</p>	<p>Organise estate meetings in SW London and invite a solicitor</p> <p>Door knock, poster, leaflet if there is a housing injustice</p> <p>Write and send press releases to media outlet</p> <p>Share about injustice on social media</p> <p>Teach tenants how to record their cases, including linking complaints by multiple tenants</p> <p>Explain the complaints processes you need to go through with your landlord before escalating the issue</p> <p>Support protests, marches and rallies</p> <p>Submit evidence and speak with politicians</p>

## 2. Challenges around engaging local authorities

Tenant representatives compared their experiences over the past couple of years, especially regarding their boroughs' respective complaints procedures and tenants' concerns around local authority or councillor responsiveness.

- A Kingston tenant rep spoke about how Rhi/SWLLC's advice had led to better engagement by local councillors around issues of maintenance on their estate. Despite increased engagement by the local authority, however, the sub-contractor on the project refused to show up for an estate walkabout with tenants and councillors, evading questions of their lack of action. The tenant rep first wrote a letter to complain about ground maintenance and window cleaning, which hadn't been done – despite tenants paying for this in their service charges. After seeking advice from SWLLC, this tenant documented every interaction they had (or didn't have) with the maintenance companies.

Local councillors became interested in the case as soon as this tenant indicated that the Law Centre was involved. Although the tenant representative and Rhi from SWLLC both lament that it took the name-dropping of the law centre to get attention from the local authority, they also both recognise that this is one way in which law centres can support collective tenant organising and action.

- A tenant representative from Sutton made a poignant observation about the challenges facing tenants with disrepair or other issues on their estates. He said the Ombudsman is, in legalistic terms, the supposed knight in shining armour who is available to everybody.

But in our experience, the battle has to be fought on a much more local basis to start with so that the narrative cannot be ignored, whether it's a private landlord or a local authority.

Local authorities can be difficult to deal with. However, their misbehaviour is different from the rampant misbehaviour of private landlords who simply seek to destroy residents' will to fight and do so by establishing such a state of disrepair that the tenant, in effect, is struggling simply to survive and doesn't have the energy or opportunity to focus on organising.

- A Croydon tenant rep said that many things had changed on the council side, and especially in the past few years, both during the pandemic and before that. Things have gone from bad to worse. To even talk to a councillor or raise an application is like trying to see a GP in an NHS hospital. It is as if they have no regard for residents. They aren't doing anything. If you happen to talk to councillors, it all comes down to finances. Since the pandemic, many officers have stopped listening or responding.
- We need to help people who have had major issues with the maintenance and disrepair of their homes. The council always blames it on the pandemic and says that somebody will come and work on the issue. But it never

happens. You remind them after a month, after two months and it takes you half an hour to an hour to even speak with somebody. It is breaking the trust of the residents and the leaseholders.

- Just having a mechanism for solving problems doesn't mean that problems will be solved. There aren't necessarily resources to deal with them. This is the core of everything. What was resourced before 2010, is no longer. In the past, you would have an effective centre for residents' groups.
- There is a need to enable residents' action groups or residents' associations to function on an effective basis. But you have to have an energised core which moves the issues forward 24/7. This has been systematically destroyed in many London boroughs as a way of removing accountability because there are literally hundreds of residents across all 32 boroughs who wish to have their legal entitlement to housing at a reasonable, safe standard. But if you remove the resources that enable there to be an automatic, effective gathering point for generating a coherent narrative with the local authority, then you simply set residents up to fail.
- Initially that created anger, then exhaustion and despair. This has been the mood music for the last 12 years. There are systems there to help, but landlords are feckless and not responding. The truth is, you can't respond with corporate power unless you've got the basis to be in effective communication and to institute a form of accountability that can't be sidestepped by the contractor simply choosing not to present.
- The loss of Kingston Federation has had a disastrous effect on the ability of tenants' groups to organise effectively around their concerns. We are just clawing our way back at the moment. With the Kingston Fed, we got there before things happened and sorted them before they got out of hand. But now we are fighting our way in without resources.
- It's not that residents don't want results, it's that the method of getting results has been taken out of the system. Sometimes by accident, but sometimes deliberately this has been by taking away the money that enables tenants to hold landlords accountable. Anything we do in the next 2-3 years needs to recognise how significant that process [of defunding social housing and local authorities] has been.