

Item No. 8.	Classification: Open	Date: 18 September 2018	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		Review of the Council's Approach to Community Engagement	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All Wards	
Cabinet Member		Councillor Rebecca Lury, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure, Equalities and Communities	

FOREWORD – COUNCILLOR REBECCA LURY, DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CULTURE, LEISURE, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Community engagement is vitally important to our borough and I want to make it better.

One of the complaints that I hear most often when we talk about the council's consultation process is that we don't consult enough, or that we don't consult in the right way.

Too often, there is a consultation, which our residents give their time to, coming up with creative solutions and fighting for their community, but we don't do well enough to tell them that we have listened.

We fall at the final hurdle, not showing them that we value their opinions, and the changes that we have made to our plans as a result.

That is why this paper sets out the council's commitment to our residents to co-create a better borough through establishing a set of Consultation and Engagement Principles.

We will undertake a process which will assess the current evidence and what others are doing in this space, before looking to co-design a set of principles with the community in Southwark. These will then be tested and challenged to ensure that our principles are robust, before we roll them out to the whole of the council.

In doing so, the council will set out a new approach to consultation and engagement, to which the whole council can be held to account.

I hope that Cabinet agree the recommendations in this report so that we can move ahead with establishing a new approach to consultation and engagement in the borough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Approves a review of the council's approach to community engagement.

2. Approves the methodology for developing the approach outlined in the paper.
3. Notes that our approach is based on being open, honest and transparent and involves working closely with our colleagues within the council, residents, locally based organisations and partners and our commitment to proactively disseminate and intermittently review, assess and evaluate our engagement efforts in the spirit of continuous improvement. Some of the goals of the new approach will be to look at how we can:
 - Build our principles, approach and practices in community engagement upon the emerging evidence and best and promising practices
 - Embed collaborative working with key engagement partners such as the CCG, Healthwatch and Community Southwark.
 - Ensure that a broad range of voices are heard; that these reflect the diversity, and inclusiveness of the borough; and we that reach all parts of our community not just those that speak the loudest.
 - Ensure that our engagement contributes to building strong and trusting relationships with our communities and develops continuing relationships with our communities building on the principles of asset based community development.
4. Notes that recommendations on new approach to engagement will be presented to Cabinet by April 2019.
5. Notes that this work will sit along side and inform and be informed by the current Review on Resident Involvement and support the development of the Consultation Charter to ensure local residents can hold private sector developers to account.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

6. In December 2012 the Cabinet agreed a new approach to Community Engagement, which set out the principles for engagement that the council continues to use.

The current principles are:

- **Communicate** – where we provide high quality, comprehensive information in a range of formats so that residents can choose the best option for them
 - **Consult** – when we ask you to tell us what you think about something, by completing questionnaires, online surveys or feedback forms, attending forums or one-off focus groups, and we listen to what you tell us before we take any action
 - **Decide together** – where we work closely with residents to share ideas and options and together decide what we are going to do
 - **Act together** – where we work with our partner organisations on shared priorities and deliver outcomes together
7. The approach adopted in 2012 reflected that Southwark had a very well developed architecture of engagement including the formal housing tenant and resident involvement structures, the community councils, a range of service user

forums and working parties, the Southwark Youth Council, Voluntary and Community Sector Networks and a range of Community of Interest Forums.

8. However it also recognised that many of our residents were not involved in these traditional structures, so as well as seeking to improve engagement through our existing structures we would offer more new methods for others to engage, reflecting their interests and the time they can give.
9. Since its introduction we have had a number of successful engagements that have delivered these principles and where residents in Southwark have had a key role to play in influencing the decisions we have made or how we work with our residents. The following are examples of this:
 - The Housing Commission 2013
 - Working with SHU residents to tackle isolation and building connections with VCS 2013/2014
 - Charter of Principles 2014
 - Putting Residents First review 2015
 - Ageing Well consultation 2015
 - VCS Strategy 2016
 - Youth and Play strategy 2016
 - Fire Safety Resident Scrutiny 2017
 - Southwark Conversations 2017
10. In particular the Southwark conversation and 'Lets Talk about...' brand has facilitated our reach of people who are not participants in our formal engagement structures, and our ongoing monitoring of participants supports us ensure that we are speaking to those who are affected and that participants reflect the diversity of the borough. There are now about 100 consultations placed on our consultation hub annually and the number of responses in 2017 was 14,980 representing a 77% increase on 2016.
11. The work to develop the VCS strategy in partnership with the VCS is an excellent example of co production and partnership working.
12. We are currently working to develop a new relationship with faith organisations and working with the Latin American community to support improved access to services and celebrate their contribution to life in Southwark.
13. We developed an engagement guidance in 2017 to support the council deliver improved consultation and engagement across the range of work that we undertake.
14. In 2017 the council undertook both a consultation on resident involvement focused on the experience of our tenants and leaseholders and the Southwark conversation which asked:
 - What are some of the ways you are personally involved in contributing to life in Southwark?
 - How do you think local people could become more actively involved in the changes that are happening in their communities?
15. These consultations and work on Charter of Principles and the ongoing work with faith organisations have provided invaluable feed back on how people are and

would like to be involved in their communities and with the council. This provides a foundation from a wide range of voices on which to review and refresh our approach to community engagement.

16. Although there are examples of good work across the council our engagement is still at times criticised and some people feel that their voice is not heard, or miss opportunities to get involved, and in particular there are parts of our community that can have less influence than others. There remains inconsistency in the approach used across the council and there is a need to ensure that the council reaches seldom heard communities.
17. In particular there is a gap between working with the voluntary sector and organisations resourced to partner with us, and the outreach approach both on the street and through our partners that can exclude knowledgeable voices from our dialogues.
18. There are a number of organisations in the borough who play a significant role in engaging with residents on issues that concern them, in particular the CCG, Communities Southwark and Healthwatch. A review of our approach should also think about how we can work better together to ensure wider and more imaginative engagement to deliver both better relationships and better feedback to inform our policy and service development.
19. A review of our approach, the tools and mechanisms we use to reach people and how people belonging to different communities are able to engage with us on key decisions is timely. The review will establish a new set of engagement principles that will deliver consistent approach to engagement but ensuring that we remain flexible and able to adapt how we engage to the needs of each situation.
20. This review will support the work to deliver the fairer future principle outlined in the new Council Plan of 'a modern efficient council working with the community listening to residents and open to you' and ensure that throughout the eight priority themes and the new vision for a fairer future the voice of our residents is at the heart of our decision making.
21. Our ambition with this review is to strengthen our engagement with our residents, and locality based organisations improve their satisfaction with this engagement, and agree an approach to continuously improving our standards.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

22. The methodology for the review will follow the following stages:
 - **Stage one: Assessing the evidence** - review of current evidence base and literature regarding best and promising practices on community engagement. Collation and summary of resident feed back received through the Southwark Conversation and evaluation of recent community engagement events.
 - **Stage two: Developing the principles** - work with colleagues within the council as well as key external partners such as Community Southwark, Healthwatch, the CCG and community representatives through a series of workshops that begin to develop, test and improve the principles and objectives for the new approach that will outline the why, what, how and

when we engage.

- **Stage three: Testing and challenge the emerging principles and approaches** - engaging more broadly with a wider group of stakeholders, building on our commitment to diversity and inclusion, on the emerging approach and with business units in the council to ensure that the principles and approaches are feasible, acceptable and deliverable across the many services that engage with our residents and businesses.
- **Stage four: Reporting and dissemination** - reporting to cabinet on the Proposed new approach to community engagement by April 2019 with a plan for broader dissemination within the council and with key external partners on the new ways of working and continuous improvement.

23. Consideration will also be given to a number of cross cutting themes including and how we build these into the new approach:

- **Digital approaches:** How we can broaden the range of digital mechanisms on offer for engagement?
- **Efficiency and effectiveness:** How we can meet our objectives within the resource constraints and how those organisations responsible for engagement in Southwark can work more collaboratively, on engagement with the community.
- **Quality of our engagement:** How the way in which we deliver engagement improves the quality of our decision making, the quality of our proposals and builds the capacity of the participants.
- **Equalities:** This provides an opportunity to consider how we use engagement to better deliver our obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty and ensure that when we consult with the public that participants reflect the diversity of the people who live and work in the borough.

Community impact statement

24. The public sector equality duty requires public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their day to day work, in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.
25. This review of our approach to engagement and how we place residents at the heart of our decision making will bring about improvements in our processes to ensure that residents are included in the design of policy, local development and services and the varying needs of our communities.
26. Our approach to engagement will remain one that seeks to widen participation while ensuring that the process is able to adapt to local needs and circumstances.

Resource implications

27. The work has no resource implications as development of the new approach will be absorbed into existing work plans.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance (FC18/009/SR)

28. Relevant budgets previously held within the Communities division of the Housing and Modernisation department have been identified for virement across to form part of the newly-established Place and Wellbeing department. These include provision already made in 2017-18 for the delivery of a Community Engagement service, and no additional resource forms part of this transfer

Director of Law and Democracy

29. The report seeks Cabinet's approval of a review of the council's approach to community engagement, and its methodology.
30. The report contains an account of the existing approach to community engagement, and the benefits that engagement can bring. While exercises in community engagement are desirable, for the reasons set out in the report, there are circumstances where some form of engagement, specifically "consultation", will be a mandatory legal requirement in the exercise of one of the council's many functions. There may be an explicit statutory duty to undertake consultation. Alternatively, the council may have made a statement or a promise that it will undertake some consultation, or there may be an established practice of consultation on a particular issue, either of which may give rise to an expectation that such a consultation will happen. In the absence of any of these factors, consultation may nonetheless be necessary if a failure to consult will cause particular unfairness.
31. Where consultation takes place, it must meet a minimum standard of fairness if it is to be considered lawful. In order to ensure any consultation is fair, the following fundamental principles of sound consultation should be followed: consultation should happen when the proposals are still at a formative stage; sufficient information should be given to enable the proposal to be intelligently considered; adequate time for responses should be given; and decision makers must conscientiously take into account responses to a consultation before finalising any proposal (see the Supreme Court decision in *R (Moseley) v Haringey London Borough Council* (2014)).
32. Cabinet is reminded that the council is subject to the public sector equality duty in section 149 Equality Act 2010. This requires the council, in the exercise of all its functions, to have due regard to the need to:
- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Paragraph 24 refers to the “cross-cutting” theme of equality, and giving consideration to the use of engagement by the council as a means of complying with this duty. Cabinet should note that the public sector equality duty is a continuing one, and will be therefore be a relevant consideration in the development of the methodology of the review, as well as a factor to consider when undertaking exercises of engagement in the future.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Future Approach to Community Engagement Cabinet paper December 2012	Southwark Website	
Link: http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ielssueDetails.aspx?IId=50001026&PlanId=0&Opt=3		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Councillor Rebecca Lury, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member For Culture, Leisure, Equalities and Communities		
Lead Officer	Kevin Fenton, Strategic Director of Place and Wellbeing		
Report Author	Jessica Leech, Community Engagement Manager		
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CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER			
Officer Title		Comments Sought	Comments included
Director of Law and Democracy		Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance		Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member		Yes	Yes
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