

Item No. 13.	Classification: Open	Date: 30 April 2019	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	

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

Consultation and engagement are the foundations on which good relationships are built. As a council we undertake a huge amount of consultation and engagement on issues from parking, to parks and leisure centres, through to building new council homes. The scale of each of these interactions is not the same, but that does not mean that there shouldn't be some consistency in the way that we approach engagement with our residents.

The way in which the council currently undertakes conversations with our residents is one of the most frequently raised issues - with residents highlighting that the council does not do as well at consultation and engagement as it should do. Often we do not communicate as much and as clearly as we should, and residents do not feel like they receive adequate feedback to understand how their comments have influenced a decision and any modifications to the approach that have been taken.

In setting out an approach to consultation and engagement, the council is making a clear statement about the important role that we believe our residents have in the decision making process.

We should be holding ourselves to the highest standards to ensure that we are delivering the best outcomes for our residents and the best way in which we can do this is through ensuring that we are listening to them in the first place.

Working alongside the community, we have developed the Vision and Principles set out within this cabinet report. On their own, they cannot change the way in which we build relationships with our residents, but this is the beginning of a process of embedding within the council a set of principles that can shape every external interaction that we have. In doing so, we can improve our relationships with residents, and build a better Borough for all.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That cabinet:

1. Approves the vision and principles for consultation and engagement set out in paragraphs 10 and 11.
2. Agrees that the vision and principles outlined will inform the way in which the council works with residents throughout the borough on any matters which involve

engagement and consultation.

3. Notes that this is the first stage in our work to develop our approach to community engagement. Following adoption of a vision and principles for community engagement, we will continue to work collaboratively with the community to develop a thorough plan for how the council will look to uphold the vision and principles throughout every department and in all dealings with residents
4. Agrees that we will return to cabinet in September 2019 to present a detailed report on our approaches. This report will outline how we will engage across the range of community engagement tasks including statutory consultations, service reviews engagement activities, inclusion work, work to build and strengthen communities, and developing and maintaining key partnerships with the community and voluntary sector.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

5. In September 2018 cabinet agreed that we should carry out a review of our engagement approach, which had been adopted in December 2012. This set out the milestones for engagement for this review; however the community and voluntary sector requested that we amended our methodology to allow for them to have a larger participatory role in the development of the principles. We agreed that we would work first on the vision and principles, presenting these to cabinet and return to work with community on how we would implement these.
6. The cabinet report set out that any changes to the existing ways of working should be 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 should 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.
7. Cabinet also asked that the review gave consideration to a number of cross cutting themes including 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 integrate and better deliver our obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and ensure that when we consult with the public that participants reflect the diversity of the people who live and work in the borough.
8. In addition, this is an opportunity to take steps to include and actively encourage those groups who are harder to hear and under represented and also to ensure that consultation includes those groups directly impacted by proposals, reviews and developments.
 9. The points made above will continue to inform the work we do to develop the approaches in the next phase of our collaborative work with communities.

10. **The Vision**

Working with the community, we are recommending the following is the overarching vision for consultation and engagement.

“Southwark values the opinion of all those that live, work, worship, study and volunteer in our Borough. We know that our people are our greatest assets and we place consultation and engagement with our whole borough at the centre of everything that we do.

We believe that everyone has an equal and valuable voice, and we work with our communities to ensure that everyone is well-informed about decision making, can have their say and are listened to.

Our approach to consultation and engagement ensures that we build and support the growth of our Borough working hand-in-hand with everyone in our borough.”

11. **Principles for consultation and engagement**

Working with the community we are recommending the following principles to underpin this vision.

“We will ensure that our engagement reflects the diversity of people who live and work in the borough as this is critical to understanding the needs and aspirations of everyone, deliver better services and places and will be one of the ways we are able to deliver a number of key council commitments such as regeneration for all, and placing people at the heart of our decision making.

Relationship building lies at the core of delivering the above and the Council will work closely with community organisations to create and nurture these relationships. Asset based community development approaches will be the foundation of our work with communities.

Our engagement and consultation will be underpinned by putting people at the heart of our engagement, effective planning and through meaningful engagement:

We will put people at the heart of engagement through engagement that is:

- **Built on trust:** We will be transparent, open and honest making clear the purpose of the engagement and any limitations
- **Inclusive:** We will work with businesses, and those that work, live, worship, study and volunteer in Southwark. We will make a particular effort to connect with seldom heard communities and those likely to be most affected by any potential change
- **Collaborative:** We will bring together groups across our communities and work with partners as appropriate.

We will plan our end to end engagement effectively through practice that is:

- **Reflective:** We will both reflect internally on what can be improved on an ongoing basis in our approach to consultation and engagement and seek external evaluation of our activity
- **Timely:** We will allow sufficient time and provide sufficient information and background to permit informed decisions and response. Engagement will take place from the earliest possible stages in the process of developing policy, reviewing a service or making plans for our places
- **Proportionate:** Our strategy for consultation and engagement will be proportionate for the nature of the programme, project, policy or activity that is proposed, providing appropriate resources and planning to ensure our engagement is effective
- **Evidence based:** When we engage or consult any proposals will be founded on evidence based approaches.

We will deliver meaningful engagement through being:

- **Simple & Accessible:** We recognise that everyone's needs are not the same. We will provide engagement and consultation in plain English and provide materials in a variety of formats to support our varied communities get involved
- **Clear and informative:** We will provide enough information well explained, to ensure full and meaningful participation
- **Responsive:** We will ensure that there is timely feedback about the outcome of any engagement, evidencing the engagement and how it has been taken into account."

Method and results

12. We held four workshops in February, two aiming to develop a vision and two where we discussed the principles that will contribute to delivering this vision. Overall 56 attended the first two sessions and 67 the second set. The participants were a good mix of residents, community and voluntary sector organisations and council staff. The sessions were mainly facilitated by people who were not members of the consultation and involvement team to ensure that the discussions were hosted neutrally. 116 people are now on the mailing list for this work.
13. The reasons for engaging, the benefits of good engagement and the vision were reviewed and amended through the second set of workshops. Everyone who expressed an interest was sent a copy of the outcomes and notes of what was said at each of the sessions, and invited to send further commentary on the vision and principles as part of the process for developing these.

14. Overall the workshops were well received with one participant saying *'great work in bringing so much content and workshop material together.'* and one of the facilitators said *'quite blown away by the amount of genuine sharing that took place at our tables.'*
15. The key themes that emerged in the sessions were around:
 - Relationships
 - Diversity
 - Feedback
 - Earlier engagement
 - Greater input into shaping the process of engagement
 - Learning, monitoring and quality assurance.
16. In the workshops participants spoke from their own experiences of engagement in both Southwark and elsewhere, as both practitioners and participants. This has meant we already have a wealth of material to begin the next phase of the discussions on how we should engage across a range of activities. This is in addition to the material we have already collected through other engagement such as the Southwark conversation, and resident involvement work.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

17. Our principles are underpinned by asset based community development approaches. ABCD has four core principles:
 - a. It focuses on community assets and strengths rather than problems and needs
 - b. It identifies and mobilises individual and community assets, skills and passions
 - c. It is community driven – 'building communities from the inside out'
 - d. It is relationship driven.

At the core of ABCD is its focus on social relationships. Formal and informal associations, networks, and extended families are treated as assets and also as the means to mobilize other assets of the community. By treating relationships as assets, ABCD is a practical application of the concept of social capital.

18. To begin the journey to reshape our engagement practice it was important to establish a common understanding of what was meant by the term community engagement and jointly map the scope of work affected by the review of community engagement.
19. During the discussions the following definition of community engagement emerged:

'Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people linked by geographic proximity, a community group, a voluntary sector organisation or similar situations to address issues affecting the wellbeing of those people. Community engagement is something that happens every day, in every interaction, at every level, as we all carry out our day to day business. The process of engagement aims to create better relationships and greater trust and an equal exchange of viewpoints both peer to peer and between the council and other participants.'

The ways we engage are through research, consultation, involvement, communication, networking, listening, learning, understanding, devolved decision-making, supporting community action, building cohesion and developing long term relationships with different communities; all in ways that ensure that diverse places and people are enabled to fully take part.'

20. In Southwark community engagement covers a range of tasks including statutory consultations, engagement activities, inclusion work, work to build and strengthen communities, service review and developing and maintaining key partnerships with the community and voluntary sector.
21. The workshops identified the purpose of community engagement, which will help to inform engagement planning. They also identified what good engagement looks and feels like to the people participating and the outcomes the council and others can expect. This will support the evaluation of our engagement activity and establish ways of working and a framework for teams across the council. These are also set out in appendix 1.
22. The final session of the workshops explored some of the challenges to the delivery of good engagement. These will be considered in more detail in the next stage of the review, and will shape these discussions. They broadly fitted into three themes around culture, process and resources. In particular the following issues were identified:
 - Resources invested in engagement within the council
 - Resources invested in the community sector to support community capacity building and engagement
 - Consistency across the council in the quality of its engagement
 - Lack of forward planning which leads to less engagement, consultation fatigue, and sense of no influence.
 - Culture within the council.
23. In preparation for the next phase of the development of our approaches to community engagement we have begun to explore how we can make better use of digital technology to broaden our reach and improve the depth of interactions digitally, using the learning through our participation in the EU wegovnow research project, and working across the council with colleagues involved in the various strands of digital inclusion work.
24. Community Southwark have been very supportive of our work on developing our approaches providing three of the workshop facilitators, introducing the sessions and organizing our liaison with Southwark Voice. Their early thoughts are that the work on vision and principles is very much aligned with their own principles and values and as the work progresses interested in exploring in more detail how they can collaborate more closely and support the delivery of our new approach. In particular their thoughts are that they could support us in a number of ways by doing:
 - Research on our behalf
 - Research with us
 - Supporting people get involved.
25. Desk top research in November and December 2018 indicated that few local authorities in London currently have an engagement strategy that outlines the principles for the work across the whole council that have been refreshed in the last three years. While many have engagement strategies for particular areas such as

statement of community involvement or working with their tenants and leaseholders.

Policy implications

26. This work should strengthen our ability to deliver a number of policy objectives such as our work with community and voluntary sector through common purpose common cause framework, and will inform the way in which we work to deliver community engagement across the whole council and develop the architecture we put in place to work with different groups and around different issues, such as those who live in our council homes, faith groups, or on planning matters.
27. This will shape both the development and delivery of a number of key council plan objectives such as, the developers' consultation guidance, Statement of Community Involvement, review of the way we engage with residents who live in our homes, and balloting of tenants.

Community impact statement

28. The recommendations in this report are based on our close working with members of the community either through their organisations or individually, and has been supported by our key partners who deliver engagement in the borough such as Community Southwark, health watch and the CCG. Over 116 people have participated in some way with the process of developing the vision and principles.
29. The methodology used has been based around co-production of the vision and principles and developing a common understanding of what engagement means and involves.
30. The importance of ensuring that diversity of experience informs our decision making has been placed at the heart of our vision and principles, as well as making sure that those who participate reflect the diversity of those living, working, worshipping, studying and volunteering in the Borough.
31. This will be reflected not only in how we engage and consult on particular issues and in specific places to ensure that our work reflects the needs of the community affected by any decisions we make, but also the way in which we work with different communities to support our reach, and develop relationships that improves our ability to integrate a range of voices in our day to day business; voices such as the faith communities, young people, older people, LBGTQ+ community, disabled people, people from different black minority and ethnic backgrounds and men and women.
32. The vision of Southwark as a place incorporates a strong vision about working with all our community partners including faith organisations. The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires public bodies to consider the diverse needs of groups and people 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. Due regard is about considering the different needs of protected characteristics in relation to the three parts of the duty.
33. 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 and strengthen our capacity to deliver the PSED.

34. Knowing and understanding our communities is key to effective delivery of council equality and diversity commitments and the PSED. Community engagement and consultation plays an important role in this. An effective equality analysis process starts when scoping a project and engagement plan. A key principle is that both consultation and equality analysis need to be considered at the start of any review, development or project scoping and planning process. Equality analysis informs and is built upon throughout the lifetime of a review/development/project, through to decision making stages and also implementation of decisions.
35. 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

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

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance (FC18/042)

37. The strategic director of finance and governance notes that there no new financial implications arising from this report as all related expenditure are expected to be funded within existing budgets.
38. Staffing and any other costs connected with this report to be contained within existing departmental revenue budgets.

Director of Law and Democracy

39. There is no specific duty requiring local authorities to establish a general community engagement strategy, but local government legislation over the years has included a number of measures aimed at promoting the involvement and empowerment of communities served by councils, including the Local Government Act 1999 and the Localism Act 2011. The report identifies the benefits such a strategy bring to the council in carrying out its full range of statutory functions. In that regard section 111 of the Local Government 1972 gives a local authority powers to do “any thing ...which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions”.
40. The council is frequently required by law to engage in consultation processes, eg when formulating new or revised policies. It will be important that where particular legal steps need to be followed in any such processes, they are properly considered and included and legal advice obtained at an early stage to assist. Whenever consultation is undertaken by the council, it will always be necessary to ensure that the basis of the consultation is clear, that it engages with the appropriate audience, at a sufficiently early stage in the process with sufficient time given for responses which are then taken into account in any subsequent decision.
41. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, in making this decision the cabinet must comply with its public equality duty which requires it to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is

prohibited by or under the 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.

42. The community impact statement set out in the report and the Equality Impact Analysis prepared identifies relevant matters to be taken into account in discharging that duty.
43. Whilst there is no duty on the council to consult residents in relation to formulating this strategy, the report demonstrates how the council has taken account of the views of relevant groups and individuals in the community.
44. The establishment of this strategy is an executive function reserved to cabinet which includes the “approval of policy and procedures governing the council’s relationship with the voluntary sector”.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Future Approach to Community Engagement Cabinet paper December 2012	160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	Jessica Leech 0207 525 5853
Link: http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ielssueDetails.aspx?IId=50001026&PlanId=0&Opt=3		
Review of the Council’s Approach to Community Engagement September 2018	160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	Jessica Leech 0207 525 5853
Link: http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=50017721		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Vision and Principles
Appendix 2	Equalities Analysis

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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Key Decision?	Yes	
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
Equalities Officer	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	11 April 2019	