

Why do we engage?

The purpose of engagement is to develop relationships with, residents and businesses, community and faith groups, voluntary sector organisations and those that work, study and volunteer in the borough so the council can:

- Create and nurture relationships with people and community organisations
- Understand people's experiences of services they use and the neighbourhoods they live in, visit and move through and better use this local intelligence and local expertise to improve people's wellbeing
- Ask people what they think
- Ensure that all those that are affected by something we are doing or failing to do, have a chance to say how this will affect them and what matters
- Enable two way and multi way dialogues about change in an area and about the services people receive
- Let people know about and explain what is happening in Southwark and how to get involved
- To provide fair and informed decision making
- Build confident, skilled, active and influential communities
- Bring people together where there are shared interests
- Build better connectivity between the council, community organisations and residents.

What are the benefits?

The outcomes of good engagement are:

- Building trustful and meaningful relationships, which create opportunities to do other things together
- Better services and better neighbourhoods
- Brings communities, community organisations, the voluntary sector, frontline staff and commissioners together
- More civic engagement across a range of activities from voting to running a local project, to good neighbourliness
- Better understanding of community need and impact of changes to services and places leading to improved decision making
- Communities and their organisations able to feed in and contribute to policy making
- Communities and their organisations able to contribute to decisions about what matters
- Participants feel valued, respected, listened to and empowered and they are more likely to own the outcomes
- Improved wellbeing and a better sense of belonging
- Builds connections across Southwark's diverse communities
- Generate innovative ideas and solutions
- Confident, skilled, active and influential communities
- Effective and inclusive community organisations.
- Effective relationships between community organisations and other organisations and services
- Reduces tension and conflict
- Saves time and money
- Facilitates learning from one another and upskilling of all those involved

What is community engagement?

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.

Vision

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.

Principles that underpin our 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.