

<b>Item No.</b> 14.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 11 December 2012	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Cabinet
<b>Report title:</b>		Future Approach to Community Engagement	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All wards	
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>		Councillor Claire Hickson, Communities and Economic Wellbeing	

## **FOREWORD, COUNCILLOR CLAIRE HICKSON, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMIC WELLBEING**

In a time of austerity we need to use our finance and other resources to support the voluntary and community sector and community involvement in the most effective way we can, linked to our overall vision of a Fairer Future for All. As part of this we need to ensure that the council is engaging with our residents in the most effective way possible. Bad engagement, like holding what can be characterised as ‘sham consultations’, is worse than no engagement at all. But good engagement, where we have a genuine dialogue with our residents, groups and businesses has huge benefits. Not least of these being that people can understand why we are taking decisions and prepare themselves for change. The best engagement can lead to the best decisions as residents, businesses or local groups become part of the solution itself by taking responsibility for the outcomes.

Volunteering and the voluntary sector are important but are not the sum-total of ways that people get involved in their community. Community involvement includes being a good neighbour, a good parent, a carer or local businessperson. It makes communities more resilient to shocks. It helps them through tough times, but is also more at threat in tough times.

As austerity is likely to continue, we need to understand what that will mean for the future of community engagement. We need to ensure our support builds the resilience of communities and greater participation by residents in their future. That means taking a holistic view of the support we provide and how the council supports community involvement and participation so that we are working towards building stronger communities where community organisations can take more responsibility.

This report is a starting point for how we ensure our engagement across the council is more effective. The key principles that cabinet is asked to agree makes a clear statement of what we want our engagement to be in line with our vision of a Fairer Future for All in Southwark. The report also outlines some key steps that we will take in the process of developing our new approach to community engagement.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That cabinet agrees the future high-level approach to community engagement set out at Appendix 1 of this report.

2. That cabinet notes that the approach will be further explored during the consultation on the Housing Commission and that officers will report back to cabinet in July 2013 on the effectiveness of the community engagement.
3. That officers will refresh the current mechanisms for community engagement by undertaking specific reviews as set out in paragraph 19.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

4. In June 2010, the cabinet set out its vision for Southwark. A Fairer Future for All in Southwark established a number of commitments that described the changes that the cabinet wished to achieve. This vision for Southwark guides the Council's approach to everything it does and has already informed a new approach to community engagement in a number of discussions about important issues which will have an impact on Southwark residents.
5. The first of these took place during the 2011 – 2012 budget setting process when the cabinet produced its Principles for Budget Setting. These set out a commitment to adopting a transparent, consultative approach to setting that budget, supported and informed by Equality Impact Assessments. The process included the most widespread budget consultation exercise that the council had ever undertaken. The Spending Challenge exercise was led by cabinet members who attended Community Council and other key public meetings throughout November and December 2010. Participants were given decisions to make on savings and investment across a range of service areas. In total, approximately 600 participants took part in the exercise across this period and there was face to face contact with around 1,000 people to talk about the council's Fairer Future programme and the immense challenges posed by the budget. The budget was set on 24 February 2011, which represented the culmination of a new style conversation with residents about the funding of services in the borough.
6. The second of these discussions focussed around the council plan, agreed by the council assembly at its meeting on 21 June 2011. The Council plan was developed alongside the Medium Term Resources Strategy (MTRS) 2011-14, which is made up of strategies for finance, procurement, information technology, assets, workforce and the council's relationship with the voluntary sector. The MTRS provides a solid and coherent resource framework in which the council can plan its future business.
7. The council plan:
  - sets out the Leader's vision for a fairer future for Southwark, including the six key principles that underpin that vision;
  - describes the top ten fairer future promises that will demonstrate what is being done to achieve that vision;
  - provides a priority statement from each cabinet member, describing in more detail the most important areas of activity within their portfolios. Each statement is then supported by delivery schedules of actions and targets with responsible officers identified.
8. A further component that informed development of the council plan was the council's first themed assembly debate, which took place on 6 April 2011. Themed debates were a new concept arising from a recommendation from the council's Democracy Commission. In themed debates, council assembly spends

time discussing local issues that matter most to residents. The first themed debate centred on issues relating to the future of Southwark. The Democracy Commission was charged with bringing about changes to the council assembly to make them more open relevant and engaging to the people of Southwark.

9. Finally, in late 2011 as a response to the serious disorder that took place across London the leader and cabinet launched a series of Community Conversations across the borough. As with the budget consultation this was a widespread exercise that involved open conversations in busy locations across Southwark led by the leader and cabinet members. In response to this feedback, the council launched a £1m [Community Restoration Fund](#) to provide more support for young people and businesses in the borough.
10. These are just some examples of a new style community engagement that demonstrates the council's ability to engage with residents in meaningful and interactive dialogue about the things which really matter to people living in the borough. However the approach is disjointed and inconsistent. The new approach to community engagement seeks to build upon these examples and encapsulate a template for future engagement activity.

#### **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

11. This report sets out a high-level approach to community engagement, set out in Appendix 1.
12. The Fairer Future Vision and Council Plan set the context for a new relationship with residents based on trust, openness and transparency. The vision and plan describe a new relationship with citizens and customers that make more of the council's community leadership role. Part of this role is encouraging others to come together to do more, looking to the community to work with the council to provide solutions to the issues we face together.
13. The vision and plan also set out an aspiration to work with the community and voluntary sector more effectively and look at how we can harness the talents of people in the borough to make an even greater difference in challenging times.
14. The current tough financial times for the council make it ever more important that the services that the council provides are ever more closely aligned to the needs of those they serve and that when difficult decisions are made local people have the chance to have their say.
15. Good community engagement is already happening in every department of the council. However it currently happens more intuitively than by design, exists in pockets or not at all, is not co-ordinated and could work more effectively across the piece. The new approach sets a common standard to be adopted across the council.
16. This paper is not about supplanting the role of local councillors. Elected councillors have the primary responsibility for decisions on how the council makes best use of its resources, holding the council to account on the quality and efficiency of services and representing the views of their constituents. Elected members in their community leadership role play a crucial role in engaging with local people and encouraging them to work together to address local issues.

17. The aim of effective community engagement is to ensure that we make better decisions as a result of the dialogue we have with local communities. We recognise that decisions about local services and communities are rarely straightforward and can involve balancing competing interests and demands. In many cases this also means addressing technical issues in dialogue with those with a particular expertise.
18. The Localism Act 2011 introduced a range of new responsibilities including the Community Right to Challenge, Lists of Assets of Community Value, Community Right to Bid and neighbourhood Planning, which came into force during 2012. The council has put in place its processes for dealing with these and has led the way, being the first in the country to list an asset of community value and having two active neighbourhood forums working on neighbourhood plans for their areas.
19. In this context it is important that the council clearly states to local residents and other stakeholders, including the voluntary and community sector, its commitment to effective engagement and a fundamental shift in the relationship between the council and our communities. Supporting the various roles volunteers play in communities is central to this fundamental shift in relationships.

#### **Next steps**

20. This report defines a set of key principles that the council will follow consistently when it engages with local people. Subject to agreement of these principles officers will develop and implement an action plan for how they can be embedded across the council.
21. The Housing Commission engagement will be a concrete example of this approach. The proposals for engagement will include finding new ways of reaching more people and engaging them in a more open conversation where we decide together what we are going to do in the longer term. As well as providing information to inform the future of housing in Southwark, this process will be an opportunity to test the effectiveness of new engagement methods and the success of the new approach. Officers will report back to cabinet in July 2013 the outcome of that consultation. At the same time, a report will be presented to cabinet evaluating the consultation itself and the effectiveness of the new approach.
22. As well as the specific task of engaging residents in the conversation about the findings of the Housing Commission, the council will also refresh the current mechanisms for community engagement under the banner of the new approach. The table below sets out areas of activity with timescales for review.

	<b>Task</b>	<b>Target Date</b>
1	Review the funding that is allocated by the Community Councils. One year ago a cleaner greener safer revenue fund was established that gave local residents more involvement in the allocation of resources at neighbourhood level than ever before. After the first year of this fund it is timely to carry out an annual review to consider where improvements can be made for the future.	April 2013  Implementation from 2015

	<b>Task</b>	<b>Target Date</b>
	We will explore new approaches to how we devolve resources to the community and involve them in setting priorities (community plans) for their communities and through the community participating more in the allocation of local budgets.	
2	Refresh the Southwark volunteering strategy to build on the legacy of Olympic and Paralympic volunteering and develop the menu of volunteering opportunities for all age groups and interests.	April 2013
3	Produce and implement an action plan for better co-ordination of community engagement and consultation activity across the council.	April 2013  12 month review in 2014 to agree future targets
4	Develop new tools and techniques for community engagement alongside the more formal structures including making better use of social media to broaden participation	April 2014
5	Review the implementation of the proposed housing resident involvement strategy to inform future approaches to tenant and resident engagement	April 2014
6	Complete implementation of the recommendations of the Voluntary Sector Task & Finish group that was aimed at streamlining the ways the council commissions the VCS and review what more needs to be done to improve the councils relationship with the sector. In relation to our grant giving we will co-design and co-produce these with the voluntary and community sector.	April 2014
7	Implement and review the Housing Commission Engagement Plan and produce an evaluation and action plan that informs future community engagement and consultation.	June 2013
8	Carry out 12 month reviews of what we have put in place to meet the requirements of the Localism Act provisions for the Community Right to Challenge (CRtC), Lists of Assets of Community value/Community Right to Bid (CRtB) and Asset Transfer processes	October 2013 (CRtB)  April 2014 (CRtC)
9	Work with public health teams and the VCS to empower communities in order to help people improve their own health and wellbeing; the work of the new Health & Well Being Board, and the new impetus towards wider patient and public participation represented by the new Healthwatch organisation.	April 2014

### **Community impact statement**

23. The approach and next steps set out in this report aim to enable the council to carry out more effective community engagement. It is intended that this will lead to improved engagement with all sections of the community.
24. The next steps in the approach are about improving the way we support strong, active and inclusive communities that are informed and involved in decision-making and enable us to improve public services for everyone in the borough.
25. The approach recognises the diversity of our communities, the importance of community capacity building and the need to provide better opportunities for communities to participate to influence service delivery, decision making and policy development.
26. Part of the approach is a set of good practice principles for the council to work to when carrying out engagement with all sectors of the community. As such, it does not provide or prescribe methods for engagement with different community groups but seeks to help both to reduce existing barriers to engagement and to make it more meaningful.

### **Resource implications**

27. There are no significant resource implications at this time.

### **SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS**

#### **Director of Legal Services**

28. Cabinet is advised to accept the recommendations of this report.
29. Cabinet is advised that the recommendations comply with the Fairer Future for All principles.
30. Cabinet is reminded that evidence of community engagement can be used as the basis for equalities analysis contained within Equality Assessments. The principles of community engagement comply with the public sector equality duty contained within s.149 Equality Act 2010.

#### **Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services (DKr006 12/13)**

31. This report sets out a high level approach to community engagement that will be further explored during 2013. As it stands, it does not commit the Council to allocating any additional resources. Resource implications, if any, will become clearer in future reports on this subject. As a general rule any additional future resource commitments resulting from this process will be subject to the Council's annual budget setting process.

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

## APPENDICES

No:	Title:
Appendix 1	A New Relationship with the Community - The Future Approach to Community Engagement

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Claire Hickson, Communities and Economic Wellbeing	
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Stephen Douglass, Head of Community Engagement	
<b>Report Author</b>	Stephen Douglass, Head of Community Engagement	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	29 November 2012	
<b>Key Decision</b>	Yes	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments Included</b>
Director of Legal Services	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Housing and Community Services	Yes	Yes
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>Date final report send to Constitutional Team</b>	29 November 2012	