

APPENDIX 1

A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY - THE FUTURE APPROACH TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Fairer Future Vision and Community Engagement

1. In July 2011 the Cabinet agreed the council plan which set out our promise of what we will deliver as a council.
2. The plan outlines a new relationship between the council and our residents, built on trust, openness and transparency in all we do.
3. The vision, and the six principles that underpin it, and the ten promises are the framework by which the council will create a fairer future for all in Southwark and protect the most vulnerable by:
 - looking after every penny as if it was our own
 - working with local people, communities and businesses to innovate, improve and transform public services
 - standing up for everyone's rights.
4. The vision sets out our aim to enhance the things that make Southwark special - its immense diversity and vast depths of untapped potential. Helping to unlock those talents, with nobody left behind, is what we are about as a council. Local people have told us what they want to see in how we engage with them in the future. We have listened to what they have to say and have tried to capture this in our vision for a new relationship with the community.
5. The vision states that between us, we have the knowledge, skills and creativity to solve the major problems we are facing together. This spirit of cooperation goes beyond just problem-solving. Improving the relationship and the way we engage with our communities is a strand that runs right through the vision.
6. This improved relationship with our communities means changing our approach to how we engage with them. Improving our customer service with our citizens and getting them more involved with local decision means that we must be more accountable to local people and take residents views into account when making decisions. We have to treat local people with respect to create a fairer borough where everyone takes part.
7. Our approach must be based in empathy, openness and trust. For the council, this means aspiring to be an organisation that shows residents true compassion and the same care and consideration that we show members of our own families. Listening to local people and taking their views into account when we have to make savings to budgets, so that we can protect our most vulnerable residents and preserve quality front line services that are valued by the people who live in the borough.

8. Excellent service can only be achieved through collaborative working and we must work together with residents, businesses and partners to transform public services for the people of Southwark. Working with our residents and other agencies to make the streets safer, encourage healthy lifestyles among individuals and families, and make regeneration work for local people. Empowering the community to deliver services where they can do this better than us, and being prepared to take risks and try out new ways of working.
9. We understand that securing a fairer future is more than just what the council can do with its own resources. There is a rich array of talent in Southwark, with community and voluntary organisations working tirelessly to help others and strong and connected local neighbourhoods that look after their own. With our partners in the Voluntary and Community Sector we want to develop stronger, sustainable and independent organisations, for example through the use of our transition fund, so that local organisations are better able to support residents to lead independent and quality lives.

Our Approach to Engagement

10. Our approach to engagement retains a strong focus on communication and consultation, but moves beyond these to more active and meaningful engagement in how the council delivers services in the following way:
 - **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 the outcomes together
11. This means moving beyond the old model of community engagement that is based purely on formal processes of consultation to one that engages people more actively. We can do this in a number of different ways:
 - a. People identifying priorities for their neighbourhoods – more active devolution of resources where it is possible to the community to decide how they are allocated.
 - b. Community capacity building – empowering and supporting our communities to work with each other to deal with the issues they face.
 - c. Building on our strong relationship with the voluntary and community sector to make our support more efficient and effective so that they can take more responsibility for the work they do with our communities.
 - d. Finding better and newer ways of engaging with our communities on public service improvement and on the community delivering where they are better able to do so.

12. Southwark has 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.
13. Many of our residents are not involved in these traditional structures, so as well as seeking to improve engagement through our existing structures we will offer more new methods for others to engage, reflecting their interests and the time they can give.
14. Good community engagement is already happening across the council. One example is the current work on the Children's Plan and the collection of 1000 stories and journeys about family life that will help to shape the future of local services for children and families. There are similar examples of good practice in every Department. However this work is not co-ordinated and does not work together as effectively as it could. This common approach to community engagement aims to improve the quality and better co-ordinate Community engagement and ensure that it is embedded in the fabric of the services we provide.
15. 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 for representing 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.
16. The aim of 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.

Key Principles for Community Engagement

The key principles that we will use in carrying out community engagement activities are that we will:

- Be clear about what the scope of our engagement is, whether we are communicating, consulting, deciding together or acting together.
- Engage when we know it will make a difference, when there is a real opportunity for people to have an impact and influence decisions on issues that local people care about.
- Engage at the right time, at an early enough stage for there to be an opportunity to genuinely influence a policy or service
- Allow sufficient time for good quality engagement to take place.
- Be clear about what we are asking, what opportunities there are to shape services and be honest about what can and can't be achieved..
- We will ensure that our engagement is accessible and targeted to those it needs to reach using a variety of engagement methods to broaden participation and overcome any barriers people may have in engaging with us.
- Aim to engage as widely as possible so that we increase engagement with those who are not already in touch with the council.
- Tell people what has happened as a result of their engagement.

Our engagement will build the capacity of the community to deliver services where they can do this better than us, and being prepared to take risks and try out new ways of working. Where we can we will devolve responsibility and power to the community to deliver.