

The future of housing in Southwark - resident consultation and engagement programme

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In October 2012 the independent Housing Commission explored the challenges that Southwark faces in terms of creating, sustaining and maintaining housing provision to meet the growing needs of the Borough's residents over the next 30 years.
- 1.2 The council's decisions on the future of council housing will have a major influence on the well-being of all Southwark's residents. It is vital that the council's investment plans are not only affordable and sustainable, but deliverable and effective. In order to meet this aim it is essential that all residents have the opportunity to directly influence the development of Southwark's housing strategy.
- 1.3 This report summarises the core components of a wide reaching community engagement plan to discuss the implications of the Housing Commission report. The consultation process will reflect the council's inclusive and ambitious future approach to community engagement. Cabinet is requested to approve the resident engagement programme outlined in this report.

2.0 The Aims and Objectives of Community Engagement

- 2.1 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 ‘a new relationship with the community’.
- 2.2 Underpinning our proposed community consultation programme are five key community engagement aims:
- Universal
 - Impartial
 - Comprehensive
 - Timely
 - Cost effective

How we will meet these aims is set out in table 1 below.

Table 1 Aims of Community Engagement Process	
1. Universal	<p>All stakeholders should have the opportunity to participate in the consultation process and to have their views taken into account.</p> <p><i>“About half the households in the borough live in a property owned by the council (as either tenants or leaseholders), and the rest of the population live in fairly close proximity to a council housing estate or development. Any inquiry into or report about the future of council housing in Southwark therefore touches on the lives of nearly all the borough’s residents”. Housing Commission Report 2012.</i></p> <p>Therefore, the engagement programme will provide all residents the platform to express their views about the future of Housing in the borough.</p>
2. Impartial	<p>The Housing Commission conducted an independent review of the provision of Housing in Southwark and has explored the various options available to the residents of the borough that will shape how housing policy is delivered over the next coming 30 years.</p> <p>The core aim of the engagement process will be to ask residents “a simple, fundamental question - what is the future for council housing in our borough”</p>

	<p>Residents will be asked to consider the 3 scenarios discussed within the Housing Commission report. However, it is essential for the consultation process not to be limited to asking Residents to vote for one of their preferred Housing provision outcomes.</p> <p>Rather, the consultation is an independent and impartial process that will seek to understand the views of residents in the Borough before the Council attempts to formulate and implement its strategy for the next 30 years.</p> <p>Residents will be asked to consider the following core questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who should council housing be for? • How much and to what quality? • Future Management Models? The consultation process will ask resident to consider whether different models apply in different places/for different kinds of housing and how do we get more people involved in Tenant/leaseholder Management etc.
3. Comprehensive	<p>A robust and mixed methodology approach is required to gain a clear understanding of residents' views. A summary of the proposed consultation programme is presented in section 4 of this report.</p>
4. Timely	<p>The council is making significant investments in its council housing until 2015. It now needs to plan ahead and decide how its investment strategy can best meet the needs and expectations of residents.</p> <p>To support this, the council must consider investment options for the future and fully engage tenants and leaseholders in developing a long-term strategy for council housing beyond 2015.</p>
5. Cost effective	<p>The consultation will make use of traditional and established communication mechanisms including the Tenant's and Homeowners Councils, Area Housing Forums, TRAs, Community Councils and other forums. This combined with the use of the Council's webpage and other social media tools will help maximise communication opportunities with residents while using resources in a cost effective manner.</p> <p><i>Section X of this report provides an indication of the costs of various consultation methods that will be employed during the engagement process.</i></p>

3.0 Engagement Principles

3.1 The consultation process will adhere to the Code of Practice on Consultation issued by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills. The BIS guidance outlines its consultation principles:

3.2 **Criterion 1: When to consult**
Formal consultation should take place at a stage when there is scope to influence the policy outcome.

The consultation outcomes will be used to help shape the provision of council housing over the next 30 years. The approach is one of deciding together on the options for the future. The council's current investment strategy outlines the council's plans until 2015. Therefore, consulting with Residents in 2013 will allow all stakeholders to influence the future of Housing delivery in the borough.

3.3 **Criterion 2: Duration of consultation exercises**
Consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible.

It is envisaged that the engagement programme will take place over a 6 month period, beginning in January 2013. The findings from the consultation process will be presented to Cabinet and all other key stakeholder groups in July 2013.

3.4 **Criterion 3: Clarity of scope and impact**
Consultation documents should be clear about the consultation process, what is being proposed, the scope to influence and the expected benefit and costs of the proposals.

The consultation documentation will require input from the Futures Steering Board to ensure it is user friendly to a wide range of people including tenants and homeowners and provides the information needed by residents.

An independent organisation will also be appointed as a 'critical friend' to tenants and leaseholders who can provide independent advice and carry out research to inform opinions. One of the functions of this organization will be to quality assure all core documentation produced throughout the duration of the consultation process and to ensure that tenants and homeowners in council property have a strong and informed voice throughout.

3.5 **Criterion 4: Accessibility of consultation exercises**
Consultation exercises should be designed to be accessible to, and clearly targeted at those people the exercise is intended to reach.

This report summarises the comprehensive and diverse methods that will be used to provide residents with the opportunity to express their views through out the consultation process (including, interactive voting, workshops, face to face interviews, postal, online and telephone surveys, and targeted focus groups). Background information will also be provided for participants covering key facts on housing in the borough to allow more informed conversations to take place.

3.6 **Criterion 5: The burden of consultation**
Keeping the burden of consultation to a minimum is essential if consultations are to be effective and if consultees' buy-in to the process is to be obtained.

We will seek to build on the success of recent engagement exercises, including Community Conversations and the Southwark Spending Challenge. It is envisaged that a fresh and interactive approach to communicating with residents will avoid the consultation fatigue experienced while using paper questionnaires and other time consuming research activities.

3.7 **Criterion 6: Responsiveness of consultation exercises**
Consultation responses should be analysed carefully and clear feedback should be provided to participants following the consultation.

The findings from the engagement programme will be reported to Cabinet in July 2013. A report will be published and the findings presented to tenants, leaseholders and all stakeholder groups in the third Quarter of 2013.

4.0 Consultation Methodology

Who will we consult

- 4.1 All residents living in the borough will be impacted by any changes to the provision of housing services over the next 30 years (this is especially true for tenants and homeowners). There are several mechanisms in place to ascertain the views of our tenants and leaseholders, these forums will play an important part in the community engagement process.
- 4.2 **Housing based formal meetings:** There will be consultations with people who attend TRA meetings and other representative housing based meetings, such as Area Housing Forums, the Tenants Council, and the Homeowners Council, and there is a tried and test method of consultation at formal meetings. However the complexities of the Housing Commission's report makes it important to consider the opportunities everyone involved should have to consider together their ideas and thoughts and reactions. This will be done as a "learning" session at the beginning of a formal meeting; through workshops and briefing presentations, as well as 1-1 discussions with key people such as chairpersons. Such learning opportunities will need to be done by non council facilitators, and we intend to ask the Housing Commission members to help us with this work.
- 4.3 **Community Councils:** There are consultation methods that work at each Community Council, and they vary from one to the other. As with housing based formal meetings; an offer of learning opportunities will be built into these consultations before discussions on the content of the Housing Commission report commence.
- 4.4 **Community Forums:** Southwark has a very well developed architecture of engagement through more formal community forums. These include the Disabilities Forum, Southwark Youth Forum, the LGBT Forum, the Forum for Equalities and Human Rights, the Pensioners Forum, Amador Bhoishot (Bengali community forum), the Multi Faith Forum, Southwark Muslim Forum, Southwark Somali Refugee Council, and the Refugee Communities Forum. Moreover, an offer of learning opportunities before discussions commence will be built into these consultations as well.
- 4.5 **Young People;** Because the Housing Commission's work leads us to look 30 years into the future up to the year 2045; we need to provide active roles for a team of young people so that their contributions are significant and influential. After all they will be affected by whatever outcomes happen. We will recruit young people from the Southwark Youth Council, Speakerbox and other networks such as the Bengali One project, the Youth Advisors, Rezent Radio, and SE1 United youth group. Speakerbox is a group established by the council to give a voice to looked after young people and

care leavers. The Youth Council is a group run by young people that aims to give a voice to young people in the borough.

- 4.6 **Housing Needs of Older People;** It is also important that we engage people on the housing needs of tenants and homeowners when they become older people. We will therefore ensure that the community conversations engage people in the borough who will become older up to 2045.
- 4.7 **National/Regional stakeholders;** Because of the strategic importance of council housing in Southwark it is of primary importance that the engagement programme is broader than just those living in or near council homes. The engagement exercise will also include consultations with strategic partners such as other housing providers, neighbouring boroughs and regional government. How Southwark plans for the future is also of interest nationally and we will organise a conference targeted at local authorities nationally, particularly those who are major landlords that will take place alongside the broader engagement activities set out in this plan.

How we plan to engage with residents

- 4.8 We aim to use the **Community Conversations** method of going to where people are already and offering to have conversations located around a highly visible marquee or stall, with busy shopping streets a good place to do this. This will be the centrepiece of our engagement. We will include at least a thousand people, many of whom would not be likely to express their views through other routes. We know that the enthusiasm of council decision makers to talk unmediated to people living in Southwark about very important issues, such as the future of housing, is the reason why this method has been successful already and therefore lead members and ward councillors will be invited to lead the conversations.
- 4.9 The council, working locally with community volunteers, will construct interactive methods to enable the Community Conversations to be engaging. We will make a local history based photography exhibition about housing in Southwark, there will be new 2 minute long films made by the young people's team, a questionnaire, maps of the borough past and present, and a video booth for people to tell us precisely what they think.
- 4.10 We will make the best use of our libraries by touring the same consultation products used for the Community Conversations. In addition neighbourhood based focus groups will ensure we can invite a sample of people in any given neighbourhood to input to the consultations, and therefore further extend the opportunities we give local people to have their say, and capture the differences between each neighbourhood, which may be very nuanced, and which would probably be missed otherwise.

- 4.11 **Including everyone:** We need to pay attention to people who experience barriers to having their views heard. This includes having English as a second language and being part of newer migrant communities such as Latin American and Chinese communities. Moreover, having a sight or hearing impairment, or learning disability, the effects of old age, long term illness, and having mobility impairments can be very significant barriers. A complete equalities impact assessment will be produced in December 2012 to ensure that the community engagement programme is inclusive and adheres to equality and diversity best practice in consultation.

New ways to consult

- 4.12 To maximise awareness of the Housing Commission recommendations and encourage residents to share their views about how they would like to steer the provision of housing in the borough over the next 30 years it is important to utilise ambitious and proactive consultation methods. This section explores the methods that will be used to encourage residents across all socio demographic groups to take part in the community engagement programme.
- 4.13 **Still photography/local history:** Recent photography projects in Southwark have focused on cohesion and equality issues and have been very well received. Photographs from the local history library placed alongside contemporary photographs of the same area of Southwark will mean that people can contrast the past with the present and the future. Therefore, a still photography/local history project will be set up towards the beginning of the consultation work; to enable interested local volunteers to create a resource for further stages of the consultation plan, as well as to use this method to explore Housing Commission ideas through images.
- 4.14 **Vox pops:** Consultations about planning policies have used video booths to ensure local people can express and explain their ideas, and we will do the same. We routinely capture views about Council Assembly topics by vox pop interviews in high streets with people who can spare a couple of minutes. We will do both. This will total up to a wide variety of views from a wide variety of people. One of the key aims of the consultation process is to encourage residents to consider the issues raised in the Housing Commission report. As an apolitical body the Housing Commission is regarded an independent expert. To build on this credibility it is suggested that the video booths should include a presentation by Jan Luba exploring the main findings from the Commission's report and pose a series of questions to those participating.
- 4.15 **Empowering community volunteers:** All of the consultation projects can include volunteers from many different sections of the local community, which will improve our final product. In addition it will give about 20 local people opportunities to learn new skills and potentially improve their employability.

- 4.16 **Competitions:** Not everyone wants to take part in meetings, or to volunteer, or to take part in creative projects, or to be stopped in the street to be asked their views. But some people may want to enter a competition to win a prize, and so we will find opportunities to use competitions to increase the reach of the consultation plan.
- 4.17 **Social media:** The council has a twitter account and a facebook page these will be used alongside more traditional media to raise awareness, create interest and have conversations. The council has already used discussion groups and on-line forums, such as the SE1 Forum and the SE5 Forum to gather community views. This has proved to be an effective and costly way of gathering views. The young people's team will be asked to work with our e-communications team on the content of tweets and postings, and to say how they think we can start up and continue on-line conversations. A range of methods will ensure that those who do not have access to this technology can still engage. However we will also develop an on-line survey to extend our reach to people whose preferred method of engagement is the internet.
- 4.18 **Participation in analysis:** We will have a huge number of opinions and ideas, suggestions, positive and negative comments, and creative expressions of people's thoughts and feelings. Analysis workshops with local people will both help us do our work and will ground our conclusions in reality. We will invite people according to a sample of the borough's ages and ethnicities, and by gender, neighbourhood, housing tenure, and other equality considerations. The participatory analysis workshops will be used to ensure the double checking of emerging patterns by people directly affected by the outcomes

5.0 Resources structure

Table 2.

Role	Function
Futures Steering Board	A board of residents (tenants and homeowners in council property) appointed to ensure that tenants and homeowners have a voice in the consultation alongside the wider community and to take a quality assurance role in the consultation process ensuring that it reaches as broadly as possible.
Resident Friend	An independent organisation appointed to provide impartial guidance to the Futures Steering Board and quality assurance of the consultation process documents and outputs.
Community Engagement team	Responsible for implementing all community engagement (including attending Housing forums, resident workshops and focus groups)
Communications	Creating Community Conversation webpage and responsible for managing all social media (including Twitter and Facebook accounts). Responsible for maximising participation through a proactive communications campaign
Programme manager	Responsible for the development and management of following aspects of the engagement programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality Impact Assessment. • Risk Register • Project plan and co-ordination of engagement activity • Progress reporting • Final report to Cabinet and other stakeholders

6.0 Consultation Timetable

	Task	Deadline	Nov 12	Dec 12	Jan 13	Feb 13	Mar 13	Apr 13	May 13	Jun 13	Jul 13	Aug 13
	1. Governance											
1.1	Cabinet	11 Dec										
1.2	Appointment of Future's Steering Board	28 Jan										
	2. Communication & Raising Awareness											
2.1	Community Conversation Website	18 Jan										
2.2	Pres Release & briefings to key stakeholder groups	18 Jan										
2.3	Tenants Council & Home Owners Council	18 Jan										
2.4	Appoint Residents' Friend	08 Feb										
	3. Wider Engagement Programme											
3.1	Interactive voting and video booths	14 Feb										
3.2	Still photography/local history competitions	30 Apr										
3.3	Participation analysis	15 Jun										
	4. Tenant and Homeowner Consultation											
4.1	Community focus groups & feedback to Community Forum	31 Mar										
4.2	Online survey of residents	15 May										
	5. Report Development											
5.1	Report to Cabinet	Jul 13										
5.2	Report to Tenants and Homeowner Councils	Jul 13										
5.3	Publish report on website	Aug 13										