

COMMUNITY COUNCILS - FEEDBACK FROM CONSULTATION WITH COUNCILLORS

No.	From	Feedback
1.	Councillor A	<p>I do not agree with the following item in the consultation paper:</p> <p>22. This paper recommends that local traffic management decisions are held by the leader of the council (who may delegate them to an individual cabinet member); but that importantly ward members could request that a specific decision is referred to a community council for consideration. The existing leader's notice of variation process would be used to delegate a specific decision, where there is a significant public interest and at the request of the relevant community council chair. The delegation would be for the leader to approve. Where there is not a decision making meeting scheduled, proposals could be discussed at a "town hall" forum meeting, and the recommendations of the community council referred to the leader (or cabinet member) for decision. In this way traffic management issues of local concern could still be subject meaningful local discussion.</p> <p>23. Members should be aware that the more complex the decision-making structure, the more expensive it would be to administer. A simple delegation of the decisions to either the leader or the cabinet member would be by far the most economic. This type of decision-making with a referral mechanism already happens on a number of types of decisions, e.g. most planning decisions are made</p> <p>I feel it is imperative that the traffic decisions be left for the local community and community council to enable better consultation.</p>
2.	Councillor B	<p>I appreciate and understand much of the contents of the report. However, I would be opposed to a move to the 2-5 system. I would much prefer that each meeting is preceded by a formal meeting to consider those matters of formal business, rather than two a year.</p> <p>These meetings could be guillotined, in order to reduce costs and define staff time. This would resolve the issue about the frequency of some requests.</p> <p>There are many traffic management and other proposals which are simply not appreciated by local residents until they appear on a Community Council agenda. I would fear that introducing the consultative items to the 'town hall' style meetings would be problematic too. I can see them sapping any excitement</p>

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		<p>or engagement out of those meetings, and creating a great deal of confusion. We, as elected members, have a mandate to speak on behalf of residents not there present, and to contribute from the floor creates ambiguity as to that role. To put us around a table or platform drags us back to where we are now. Much better to have them out of the way in a formal part of a meeting before the main business.</p>
3.	Liberal Democrat Group	<p>We welcome the Council's decision to review the current community council structure and its boundaries. The councils are currently too large and the review should include more consultation, with members of all parties and all residents.</p> <p>We welcome the Council's desire to engage more with the local community but <i>where</i> decision making takes place is important in defining what type of engagement we are seeking with local residents and whether we plan on keeping them engaged. The administration is forgetting how much it would benefit from demonstrating a willingness to do things in a way that is more aligned to the needs and approaches of others. These community council meetings should not become mere 'talking-shops' with a lack of concrete outcomes taking place in the meetings themselves.</p> <p>The consideration to delegate all decisions to the Leader of the Council is based on an exaggerated emphasis on balancing the books and will lead to fewer decisions being made at a local level and less transparency. The best way of fulfilling ambitions in Southwark is likely to be through considering things more broadly and looking at them as part of a wider set of collective priorities. We therefore disagree with decisions on issues like traffic management being subject to the Leader of the Council instead of local councillors who are arguably more familiar with their wards and entitled to making individual decisions. Real and meaningful engagement will be found in these ward councillors collaborating with residents to make these decisions, providing direct feedback and responding to any questions raised at the meetings.</p>
4.	Councillor C	<p>I have read the consultation paper and after due consideration would like to give my full support.</p>
5.	Conservative Group	<p>We write to object strongly to the proposals set out in this paper which take powers away from Community Councils and centralise them at Tooley Street.</p> <p>In 2010 the Labour group having secured a narrow majority fulfilled their manifesto pledge to increase the number of Council Assemblies as part of their vision to increase participation and democracy. Since when we have seen a steady reversal of the decentralisation of powers which had taken place under previous administrations.</p>

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		<p>First the number of Community Councils was reduced from 8 to 5 and the powers to determine local planning applications were removed, along with the power to appoint school governors. The excuse at the time was as a cost saving measure but that was shown to be untrue as a plan was produced which maintained the status quo at the lower funding level, but this was rejected out of hand.</p> <p>Returned with a larger majority in 2014 we have now seen the removal of the additional Council Assembly and further measures which effectively remove one if not two traditional Council Assembly meetings from the calendar.</p> <p>We particularly oppose the withdrawal of traffic management decisions from automatically coming to Community Councils. At the Dulwich Community Council on 15th March, following a public question of which notice had been given in advance, the Chair Cllr Hartley misled the meeting by suggesting there were no changes proposed. On being challenged Cllr Simmons rode to the rescue by saying the Leader had given him a promise that he had no wish to take such decisions himself, from which the DCC was left to infer that while there are changes proposed, in practice traffic management decisions would continue to come to DCC just as before. Any reader of the consultation paper will see that this is not the case and most of the decisions are likely to fall to the relevant Cabinet Member. If the Labour administration is truly relaxed about the DCC continuing as before, why should other CCs be discriminated against? Surely it would be better to leave the powers where they currently rest.</p> <p>The report sets out the value of Community Councils in Para 8 and the most recent feedback in Para 10. Nothing expressed in these paragraphs supports the assertion in Para 11 that “involvement of local people...is constrained by community councils operating as formally constituted ‘area committees’ “. We are very concerned at any suggestion CCs should move away from the existing formal structure. The role of a Councillor is to represent local people, which at times may be inconvenient for the Cabinet and the Executive. The cover of cuts must not be used as an excuse to diminish that role. Sadly one is forced to the conclusion that the bigger the Labour majority, the more centralising the administration becomes.</p>