

Approach to Community Engagement



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Introduction 01



This document outlines how we engage with our diverse communities. It sets out our vision and principles for engagement, provides a definition of community engagement and explains how we talk with – and listen to – our communities. It outlines the ways of working across a range of activity and describes some of the ways we will ensure that we deliver our principles, and illustrates these in action on some recent projects.

This document will underpin how we will deliver our engagement and consultation in a range of areas such as planning, social care and housing. It will support us to meet our legal obligations outlined in the Public Sector equality duty and our duty to consult.

Southwark is a diverse and dynamic borough in the heart of London, with many different communities and people with different lifestyles, interests and needs. Our many stakeholders include government departments and authorities such as health and transport, cultural

institutions and groups, community organisations, voluntary sector organisations, communities of faith, students and volunteers and businesses both large and small as well as those who live and work in the borough. All have a role to play in shaping our places and services and contributing to delivery of equality and fairness for all and meeting our vision for the borough.

We will continuously develop our communication techniques and engagement tools to ensure we are reaching and engaging with all our communities on the issues that matter to them, and listening to people about how they wish to be engaged, and working with voluntary and community organisations and networks to develop stronger connectivity with and between individuals and different communities.



Our Vision and Objectives

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Our Vision for community engagement

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.

Our Objectives for community engagement

Number	Objective
1	Create and nurture relationships with people and community organisations and build better connectivity between the council, and voluntary and community organisations and people in Southwark and each other
2	Understand people's experiences of services they use and the neighbourhoods they live in, work in, run a business in, visit and move through and better employ this local intelligence and local expertise to improve people's wellbeing, the quality of our places and the quality of our services.
3	Enable good governance and fair and informed decision making, through building confident, skilled, active and influential communities and a culture of getting involved.

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.

What is community engagement and what are our principles 03

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is the process of involving people in the decisions that affect their lives.

We have developed, in partnership with individuals and organisations, the following definition for Southwark:

'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. '

Our Principles:

We have agreed a set of principles that will underpin all the engagement activities across the council. Our principles are:

We will put people at the heart of engagement through engagement that is:

- *Built on trust:*
- *Inclusive:*
- *Collaborative:*

We will plan our end to end engagement effectively through practice that is:

- *Reflective:*
- *Timely:*
- *Proportionate:*
- *Evidence based:*

We will deliver meaningful engagement through being:

- *Simple & Accessible:*
- *Clear and informative:*
- *Responsive:*

Putting People at the heart of our engagement 04

The focus of our new approach is about the relationships we build. The foundation stone for this way of working is Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). **Our principles set out that our engagement will put people at its heart and be built on trust, inclusive and collaborative.**

What is Asset Based Community Development?

The four key principles of ABCD are:

1. It focuses on community strengths rather than problems and needs
2. It identifies and makes use of individual and community resources, skills and passions
3. It is driven by the community – ‘building communities from the inside out’
4. It is built on relationships

The ABCD approach emphasises social relationships and works in ways to strengthen and harness networks to support a community to grow. It is based on understanding that relationships build a community and these are made up of citizens not just recipients of services.

We know community leaders can engage others based on trust, influence, and relationship, and people act on certain themes they feel strongly about and we should use these facts to build more engaged communities.

Our ways of working should recognise that one-on-one dialogue or small group conversations are ways of discovering

motivation and invite participation and that asking questions rather than giving answers invites stronger participation.

When we engage we will collaborate with community connectors to engage more broadly and work in ways that strengthens connections and cross-community collaboration. This means that outside of wanting to talk with a community on a particular issue we will build ongoing relationships with key people and groups.



Working Collaboratively

A key way of putting people at the heart of our engagement is through working collaboratively with the people affected by the policy or change we are considering. **We are committed to bring together groups across our communities and work with partners as appropriate.** The way in which we will collaborate in each area of work will vary, and reflect the nature and scope of the project. To collaborate successfully the following practices should be used:

- Setting clear goals, objectives and roles when working together

- Making sure that the right people are part of the collaboration
- Recognising the equal value and the range of expertise of all participants
- A commitment from everyone to see the world from others point of view
- Accepting there will be differences of opinion
- Being open minded about both the problem and the solution
- Regular review to make sure the goals, participants and process are still right



Built on Trust

The council is committed to being transparent, open and honest, making clear the purpose of the engagement and any limitations. In addition we will include the following ways of working to build trust: *demonstrating the human touch and empathy, providing leadership, listening, communicating regularly and clearly, providing the right information, feeding back to explain the impact of involvement, and showing respect, commitment and good will.*



Planning our end to end engagement effectively 05

The quality of each engagement experience has a huge impact on the trust and relationships we have with people in Southwark and the quality of our places and our services.

To provide a consistent standard across the council the community engagement team will

- Provide advice and guidance to teams across the council to support them to develop their engagement plans.
- Establish an engagement advisory panel involving external partners to review our engagement plans for our more complex or strategic engagement activity, before they are finalised.
- Update and publish our engagement toolkit and offer training to Council teams, as well as direct support where engagement is likely to be more complex.
- Encourage teams to develop engagement plans with key voluntary and community partners who will be impacted by any proposal as appropriate.

Below we set out how we will deliver our four key principles for effective engagement, being reflective, timely, proportionate and evidenced based:

Being Reflective - what we will do

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.

How we will do it

1. We will report on our engagement and how it has met these principles in our Cabinet reports. We will start doing this from July 2020.
2. We will produce an annual report on our engagement work with external evaluation of a sample of our key engagement activity. The external evaluation will be completed with the engagement advisory board. Our evaluations will focus on four areas:
 - **Process** – how well was the engagement designed and implemented?
 - **Appropriateness** – was the engagement appropriate and how well did the public and stakeholders accept the process?
 - **Reach** – were the people we reached representative of those affected by the decision?
 - **Outcomes** – were the intended outcomes of the engagement process achieved and how did the engagement affect the outcome?

Being timely - what we will do

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.

How we will do it

1. We will develop a forward plan process for engagement to promote better co-ordination and make early engagement easier to plan by end of July 2020.
2. Each engagement plan will set out the end to end engagement so that is clear about when people will be able to collaborate with the council, and influence decisions and when they will know how they have had an impact on the project.
3. Engagement will take place at a time when the project is still at a formative stage
4. We will ensure that the length of our engagement period allows sufficient time for people to find out about the opportunity to be involved, consider the issues and take part.
5. The length of time for our engagement will vary for each engagement activity but will be linked to who we need to reach, complexity of the project, and the impact of the issue.

Being proportionate - what we will do

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.

How we will do it

To decide the size, length or type of any engagement activity we will consider the following:

1. Who will be affected and who has an interest in the project
2. How we can make sure we reach these people,
3. What are the activities we need to do to encourage participation by these people
4. Set out the level of participation needed to have confidence in the results
5. The size of the project and the scale of the impact
6. Any wider implications for the project, such as the complexity of the issue.

Being evidence based - what we will do

When we engage or consult any proposals will be founded on evidence based approaches.

How we will do it

We will make clear the evidence we are using to form the basis of any proposals or suggested change this will include:

1. Background research both local and national e.g. best practice, population projections
2. Local intelligence, e.g. what we know about service use and service need, what people affected and local organisations have told us

Meaningful engagement and being inclusive 06

To be inclusive we need to both reach people and ensure that the opportunities to take part attract and are user-friendly to the people we want to take part. Below we set out how we will deliver inclusive engagement and our three key principles for meaningful engagement, being simple and accessible, clear and informative, and responsive.

Being inclusive – what we will do



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

How we will do it

1. We will develop ongoing relationships with different organisations that are already connected to ‘the seldom heard’ so that we can call on them to foster participation, such as TRAs, faith organisations, Latin American groups
2. We will work with internal and external partners to identify community organisations and individuals and support us improve our reach, such as the local economy team for businesses, Clinical Commissioning Group, and our voluntary sector partners such as Community Southwark, Forum for Equalities and Human Rights, Health watch and Southwark Pensioners Centre
3. We will think about the reasons someone might want to get involved in the project and use this insight to encourage people to take part

4. We will monitor who is responding to our engagement activity so we are able to identify if particular groups are not taking part and adjust our engagement programme to ensure that all relevant points of view contribute to our decision making

Being simple and accessible – what we will do

We recognise that everyone's needs are not the same. We will provide engagement and consultation in plain language and provide materials in a variety of formats to support our varied communities to get involved.



How we will do it

1. When we plan our engagement activity this will be organised based on our understanding of lifestyle and needs of the people we want to reach
2. We will identify who will be affected and who has an interest in the project. We will use this information to decide how we will engage and what are the best tools to make sure that the right people are able to take part e.g. if the audience is older people more of our engagement will be offline; if the audience is people at work we will do more things online and in the evenings or at weekends;
3. Any information we provide will be designed to attract those who will be affected by the project

Equalities

Being inclusive and accessible will support the diversity of people who live and work in the borough get involved. 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.

Being inclusive and accessible also contributes to the council meeting its duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty. The council has a duty to find out about and consider the needs of different protected characteristics in relation to our responsibilities to:

1. Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation

2. Advance equality of opportunity, including finding out about and meeting diverse needs of our local communities, addressing disadvantage and barriers to equal access;
3. Foster good community relations; promote good relations; to be a borough where all feel welcome, included, valued, safe and respected;

The protected characteristics are Age, Sex, Gender Identity and Gender Reassignment, Disability, Race and Ethnicity, Religion or Belief, Sexual orientation, Pregnancy and maternity, Marriage and Civil Partnership and in Southwark, Socio-Economic background.

We will engage in ways that support us gaining the information and intelligence to help us understand the impact for these groups of people. This will help us evaluate the impact of what we may do and propose how this might be mitigated and what positive impact change can also bring, all before we make any decisions and as we shape our proposals.

Being Clear and informative – what we will do



We will provide enough information well explained, to ensure full and meaningful participation.

How we will do it

The information we provide to explain a project will be clear and concise, free of jargon, and provide enough information so that people can make up their minds but not so much that they are overwhelmed.

Being Responsive - what we will do

To create a culture of involvement, build trust and put people at the heart of our engagement those that have taken part need to be able to see how their involvement has made a difference.

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.

How we will do it

1. Every engagement plan will include how we intend to keep people informed of the decisions we make
2. We will make clear to those taking part how their involvement has had an impact on what is going to happen
3. When we are providing feed back on the result of our engagement we will be simple and accessible and clear and concise
4. Where we have not included suggestions and feed back from people in the final project we will explain why
5. We will provide updates where progress is delayed and timeframes slip and keep people connected to the process and people who have taken part in the engagement will be told where to find any updates.

Community engagement in action some case studies 07

To understand better our approach to engagement, we have provided some recent examples that illustrate the principles in action.



Community Empowerment Programme -

putting people at the heart of our engagement

The community empowerment programme aims to build stronger, more confident local groups, and more connected communities. It reflects our commitment to a more transparent, multi-way engagement with those who live, work, run businesses and study in Southwark.

By inviting our communities to gather in ward based groups, four times per year, to discuss the issues that affect them at a very local level, these smaller, more informal meetings are designed to allow greater depth of discussion, and provide a safe space where people can feel free to speak up. The wards also come together at two Area Forum meetings per year, where funding decisions can be announced and wider community issues can also be addressed.

This new style of engagement will provide a better insight into how people use the services and relate to their communities, which in turn will help us to deliver Council services, and support those communities, more usefully.

As part of this programme Southwark provides up to £200 from the Democracy Fund to encourage members of the community to develop robust personal links and hold their own public meetings.

In addition we invest in our local communities through the Neighbourhoods Fund that helps to fund many excellent projects delivered by local groups and organisations in the wards, and provides opportunities for local people to develop stronger communities.



Common Purpose, Common Cause – collaborative working

In 2016 the Council agreed a new Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2017 -2022. The strategy was co-produced between the Council, Southwark Clinical Commissioning Group, Community Southwark and members of the community and voluntary sector. Over 200 people participated in developing this.

The purpose of the partnership is to support a sustainable confident and resourceful community and voluntary sector that can work alongside the public and private sector to deliver the best outcomes for Southwark residents. We have focused on two key strategic objectives in order to achieve our overall vision:

- To improve outcomes for residents that reduces and prevents future demand on high cost, high demand services.
- To sustain and build strong, cohesive communities where no one group or community is left behind.

In five years we said we would

1. Create better partnership working to improve outcomes for residents
2. Improve commissioning and grant giving to focus on outcomes
3. Make better use of community assets to revitalise communities and create preventative places
4. Enable and support more resilient communities that are connected and more resourceful

Over the first two years together we have achieved the following:

We have agreed a new outcomes framework for our commissioning, launched and awarded a new grants programme with longer awards, regularly published a commissioning forward plan and are developing an online grant application and monitoring portal.

We have refreshed our approach to open spaces and adopted a new volunteering strategy.

We have begun a pilot in social prescribing and established a new fund the Pioneer Fund to invest in entrepreneurs and launched the Positive Futures fund to support innovative ways of working with children and young people to avoid harm and exploitation.

We have begun to create Social Regeneration Charters to embed social and health improvements as a key element of our regeneration projects.

We are working together to address inequality in areas such as food poverty, loneliness and improve mental well-being.

Community Conversations – *inclusive and accessible*

Community conversations are an important way to reach people who are not part of a formal or informal group. They are a valuable way to make personal contact with Southwark citizens and businesses and involve them in open conversations about a key issue facing the borough. These conversations take place in busy locations across Southwark and are often led by the leader and cabinet members. We have used community conversations to talk to people about things like the future of Housing in Southwark and how we can create a place where people in Southwark can age well.

The most recent example of how we used this approach was to find out how Southwark residents and businesses felt about change in the borough, whether they thought they were benefiting, what mattered most, what made neighbourhoods good places to be and how they would like to be involved in shaping the changes that were happening.

Discussions were held at events like fireworks night, Christmas celebrations, sports centres, libraries, children's centres, shopping centres and in our markets. We visited over 100 community groups, faith based groups, community councils, and Area Housing forums, using the connections and reach of our voluntary and community organisations to harness their networks. We employed targeted activity for groups that were not responding to our initial engagement and imaginative tools such as a world café, a pop up living room and Talkaoke to attract people who would not normally take part, and create more intimate opportunities for discussion. Over 3000 people talked to us during this two month conversation.

This has led to the creation of a new department bringing together planning, regeneration, public health and community and voluntary sector engagement and a new commitment to deliver regeneration for all with plans for social regeneration charters for each of the areas in the borough that will drive improvement in health, well being and social connections in places that are being redeveloped.



Working with communities – *inclusive and collaborative*

Relationships are the driving force of the new approach and we need to continually invest in these to be able to engage well, reach the seldom heard and collaborate with different communities.

Many parts of the council have existing relationships with community groups that they nurture over time which enables us to better understand the impact of our services, find out about how changes might affect communities and develop solutions to local issues. Examples of these are our TRAs, Youth Council, and friends of parks groups, and provider led groups hosted and supported by Community Southwark which brings together voluntary sector groups working in the same field such as those supporting young people or Latin American residents. Many of these are long standing but we continue to build new relationships with communities in the borough.

Recently we have begun developing a new relationship with our faith communities. In November 2017 we started a conversation with some church leaders about how we could work better together and the challenges joint working presented.

We worked together to consult with faith organisations to understand how connected they were with each other, the appetite for working more closely with the council and voluntary and community organisations, what were some of barriers to closer working, and their ideas for joint working. This was followed with a series of sessions which explored in more detail how these relationships could be built and what could be done and where we shared a common goal. 97 faith leaders participated.

In March 2019 the Council formally agreed a faith strategy which sets out how we would work with the faith community, and we are currently working on our joint action plan.

In the meantime joint work on improving health and addressing the needs of young people at risk of harm and exploitation has begun.

These connections will greatly improve our ability to reach a range of especially black and ethnic minority communities and understand the needs of very diverse but not often engaged communities. The action plan will help us work closely with a community full of talent, skills, resource, and connections to bring about real change for the people of Southwark.



Complex and Simple Consultations – proportionate and meaningful

Citizen Jury

Some of the things we need to discuss are very complex, nevertheless it is still important that we talk to the people who will be affected by any decisions we make. We need this insight to make good decisions. In these situations we need to work in more creative ways to ensure that engagement is meaningful for those taking part and the feed back meaningful for the decision makers.

One example is when we used a citizen jury model to explore with service users the introduction of shared care records between health and adult social care. We wanted to explore some of the risks and concerns as well as identify what we could put in place to protect clients while taking steps to improve quality of care

Everyone on the jury was selected from those who use adult social care services or their carers and were chosen so that the jury reflected those who used services by age, gender, ethnicity, type of support required e.g. mental health, or physical impairment, making the jury **inclusive**.

The group were supported throughout the process, and discussions were held in small groups to make participation **accessible**. The sessions involved expert witnesses, looking at all sides of the issue and use of testimony from people receiving care, both supporting an **evidence based approach**. The process took place over two and half days, providing enough **time** for everyone to question the witnesses, reflect on the issues, and make sure they **understood** the **information** they received. Following this the group worked on developing and finalising a set of recommendations and voted secretly on each.

There is now a plan in place for Adult Social care to implement all the recommendations and the group were invited back so we could report back what we were going to do to **respond** to their input.

Speed mitigation

Much of the work we do is very straightforward and affects only a clearly defined group of people. Direct communication and engagement with those who will be affected is the most proportionate way of delivering our engagement. Often the choice about how we should address an issue is quite simple. One such example was a road traffic calming project.

Local residents, in contact with councillors, had complained about high speeds and high levels of through-traffic on Athenlay Road, making the road unsafe for residents. This issue was supported by additional evidence. Using this **evidence based approach** we developed two proposals for traffic calming. We did an online survey asking people which proposal they preferred and to provide further comment, and residents were involved in a **timely** way, before any decisions were made. We also asked people to describe any incidents or concerns that they had with the road to support our **evidence base**.

We wrote to all households on Athenlay Road itself and to a 50m section of households on adjacent roads around 200 households in total. Adopting a **proportionate** approach, we did not hold any events as we felt this was a very localised and straightforward issue, and councillors had indicated general support for action. The consultation was open for six weeks and received 49 online responses, as well as a small number by email. Almost 70% of responses expressed a preference for one of the options. This result was put to ward councillors and the responsible Cabinet Member, and the decision was made to go ahead with this intervention. 3 months after the consultation, the results were published on the consultation hub, and residents who had provided an email address were directly informed of the decision, making sure we were **responsive**.



For more information about engaging communities and consultation please contact the team on
community.engagement@southwark.gov.uk or look on the source for information and advice <http://thesource/tools-and-resources/>