

# Southwark Council's response to Brexit

## External Affairs plan

January 2020

# Southwark's Brexit message

## Context

The UK is due to leave the European Union by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020 although the exact circumstances and timescales remain unclear. Southwark, along with councils across the country, is continuing to plan as best it can to ensure whatever the circumstances of the country's exit, we do what we can to mitigate any negative impacts on our staff, residents, businesses and the council in general.

This plan sets out how we will keep our staff, residents and businesses (our key audiences) informed about what they need to do to prepare, how we will reassure them that the council has plans in place, and how we will continue to influence key decision-makers to try to limit any negative impacts of their decisions on our borough.

## Audiences

### Staff

- Southwark depends on its staff of all nationalities to carry out essential work to support our residents and our borough. We estimate that approximately 10% of our workforce is made up of EU citizens and we want them to know that they are welcome here, and the council will support them to stay.
- Since the EU settlement scheme went live the council has run workshops, and shared information through our internal communications channels, to help our staff. We are planning another roadshow and set of communications for staff in towards the end of the year.

### Residents

- During 2018/19 the council implemented a comprehensive Brexit communications plan to ensure our residents were aware of and prepared for any changes that affect them, particularly in relation to the EU settlement scheme.

- Our communications focused on ensuring our EU residents and staff know they are welcome here and that we want them to stay, and sharing information about the support available to them. We used all the council's channels including social media, Southwark Life magazine, local advertising and our website to help increase awareness. Our EU settled status web page received 50,000 page views, and we saw excellent take up of the registrar's free EU settled status support service.
- We know that people are aware of the registrars' offer, with large numbers of people using the service, and numbers increasing over the last month or so. From January-October 2019, 2,481 people used the service, with 36% from Southwark, although the proportion is increasing with 56% of applicants in September 2019 being Southwark residents.
- Government data published last year showed an increase in awareness about the scheme, and action being taken. The number of Southwark residents who had applied for EU settled status almost doubled, with the number increasing from 12,680 to 23,620 between June and November. We estimate there are 41,000 EU citizens in Southwark and our proportion of those registered, is similar to other London boroughs.
- Useful new segmentation in the data shows us that the vast majority of residents who have applied in Southwark are aged between 18 and 64. Under-18s and over-65s are under-represented. We will include a focus on targeting these age groups in our communications.
- Over the next few months we will continue to promote these messages via our channels to encourage EU citizens living in Southwark to register for Settled Status. We will also go out to

our communities with targeted support and advice, and work with the voluntary and community sector, to ensure we reach our target groups and make it easy for people to apply for settled status.

## **Businesses**

- The council's key message for businesses is that they are a valued part of our community and we want them to stay and prosper in Southwark. Many of the council's communications for residents will also be relevant for businesses, particularly in relation to EU Settlement Scheme for staff.
- We will ensure that the information we provide to businesses is relevant and up to date including on our website, which also signposts businesses to useful information and support. We will also continue to engage with businesses through the Southwark Business Forum and other established relationships and networks.

## **Government**

- Central government is responsible for managing the UK's exit from the EU and for negotiating a Brexit 'deal' which will outline the terms of any future EU relationship.
- The council will continue to make the case to government to protect the rights of EU citizens living in our borough and to ensure that the UK's future relationship with the EU that does not negatively impact Southwark businesses. The council will also seek to gain urgent clarity on the proposed Shared Prosperity Fund and ensure local government's voice is heard and properly reflected on any review of EU laws on procurement and work place rights.

- The council has previously called on central government to properly resource councils to deal with the financial strain on local services and some funding has been provided which we will utilise as needed. We will continue to work with colleagues across London through London Councils to monitor risk and impact, and make joint representations to government about the issues that affect our residents or the council's ability to deliver services, and what we want to see in any deal.

## **Next steps**

- We will continue to update and publicise information for EU citizens on Settled Status registration and how to get support from the council through our communication channels, including the council website, social media, print and digital publications and external partners and networks.
- Details of the EU Settlement Scheme and how to apply will be included in the Council Tax mailing which will be delivered to over 140,000 Southwark households.
- We will work with and support the VCS to communicate with hard to reach groups to ensure they are aware of the scheme and can seek support to apply.
- A series of roadshows are planned for later this year to encourage residents to sign up to the EU Settlement Scheme. The council's registry service will continue to offer free support to any Southwark residents who need help applying for Settled Status.

