



Community Engagement Cabinet Review Final Report

July 15

2015

LAMBETH

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Foreword by Cllr Marcia Cameron, Deputy Cabinet member for Community Engagement and Customer Access

Lambeth is a highly diverse community which is home to nearly a third of a million people. Around 140 languages are spoken and only 40% of residents are white British, with 25% being black. The borough also has significant Latin American and Portuguese speaking populations. Lambeth is a destination for many migrants, particularly young people, and 12% of the population changes each year.

Lambeth is also a fast-changing borough, with major regeneration opportunities that will affect and benefit our communities over the coming years, such as the regeneration of Vauxhall and Brixton and major developments in Streatham and West Norwood.

We are clear in our commitment to working with citizens to achieve the changes we all want to see in the community and area, and to achieve fairness and opportunity for all our residents. That is why we are a cooperative council, and why in our Labour manifesto for the 2014 election we pledged to 'Reflect Lambeth's diversity – continuing to embed equalities in every area of service'.

However, we have some evidence, both formal through this Review of Community Engagement, and anecdotal, that despite our ambitions and the progress we've made in working with our residents in recent years, we are not engaging effectively with some people in our borough.¹

We want to change this, and so I was asked by Cllr Lib Peck, Leader of Lambeth, to Chair a Cabinet Review of Community Engagement in March 2015. The Review was led by a small panel of councillors, and aimed to understand:

- **What do we mean by engagement?**
- **Who should the council engage with?**
- **What do groups/the community want from community engagement?**
- **How well do we engage now?**
- **What are the barriers to effective engagement?**
- **What are the opportunities to improve?**

The aim of the Review was to improve the way the council plans and carries out engagement with the community, particularly ethnic minority communities, to ensure that everyone has a chance to help shape the future of the borough.

Over the past few months, we have spoken to a lot of local people, and learned a great deal about how we can improve the ways in which we engage with our diverse communities about a wide range of issues that matter to them. That learning is reflected in this report

¹ Equinox Report, <http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/20140404%20Black%20Caribbean%20community%20research%20report%20with%20foreword%20FINAL.pdf>

and the Toolkit, but these documents alone will not change the way that we engage with local people. We must recognise that engagement lies at the heart of everything the council does, it is fundamental to getting the decisions right and essential in ensuring we are building good relationships with local people.

Lambeth has been clear about its ambitions to work with local people, and that this should be part of the job of all our employees. This report and the accompanying Toolkit aims to support all our officers and councillors in achieving this by helping them to understand how this can be done effectively.

I therefore intend that the council will use the recommendations and suggestions here to change the ways we design and plan our engagement. All engagement by Lambeth should be underpinned by the principles and activities outlined here, and so this is an important piece of work that is relevant to the council's wider engagement approach. The findings and the practical actions that we have developed from the Review's work are therefore relevant to any engagement exercise, regardless of the community, the issue or the geographic area.. The Toolkit also contains very practical tips about planning engagement.

However I also think it is important that there is resource available in the organisation to support best practice, and so I also propose that the councillors and officers who worked on this review will also be a source of advice and guidance going forward.

Cllr Marcia Cameron

Deputy Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Customer Services

Introduction and Overview of the Work of the Community Engagement Review Panel

The Lambeth Cabinet Community Engagement Panel was convened between March and July 2015. This report contains an overview of the work of the Review Panel, some key principles that capture some of the major learning points of the Panel, and practical recommendations about how the council can improve its engagement with local people that can be implemented quickly. A separate report contains a Community Engagement Toolkit that has been produced as an output of this review to guide community engagement in Lambeth.

Members of the Panel

Chair: Cllr Marcia Cameron, Deputy Cabinet member for Community Engagement and Customer Access

Cllr Guilherme Rosa, Stockwell ward

Cllr Diana Morris, Thornton ward

Cllr Saleha Jaffer, St Leonards ward

Cllr Michelle Agdomar, Herne Hill ward

Ade Sawyerr, Equinox consulting

The panel was supported by the council's policy team.



Work of the Panel

The panel chose to undertake fortnightly discussions during which the panel:

- Focused on engagement with different ethnic minority groups in the borough
- Met with representatives from different ethnic minority groups
- Held its meetings around the borough – go to the communities
- Explored the ways different groups want to engage with the council
- Explored barriers to engagement that communities experience

The Panel agreed that a Toolkit which captured the learning from these conversations would support better community engagement.

The Panel engaged with:

- Representatives of Portuguese-speaking community
 - Rita Sales - Leader of Solidariedade Portuguesa in UK (Facebook social organisation)
 - Jose Galaz - Social Attaché from the Portuguese embassy
- Representatives of the Polish community
 - Marta Sortodyl and Aga Volesa (Stockwell Partnership)
- Representative of Lambeth Forum Network
 - Steve Griffin (Stockwell Partnership)
- Representatives of the Leader's Office and the Mayor's office
 - Michael Warren and Mandy Plummer
- The Chief Whip
 - Cllr Paul Gadsby
- The Jamaican High Commissioner
 - Her Excellency Mrs Aloun Ndombet-Asamba
- Lambeth Director of Communications
 - Julian Ellerby
- **Dave Burn, Lambeth Head of Democratic Services**

- Authors of Black Caribbean Research report
 - Maxine James, Equinox Consulting
 - Ade Sawyerr, Equinox Consulting
- Founder of Brixton Soup Kitchen
 - Mahamed Hashi
- **Representatives of the council's Planning and Regeneration teams.**



Areas of inquiry

The Panel explored the following key questions.

Question	Sources of evidence
<p>What do we mean by engagement? <i>Defining engagement in light of the council's ambitions regarding cooperative working and a more equal relationship with citizens</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lambeth council policy - Evaluations of successful projects - Evidence from the community about what engagement means to them
<p>Who should we engage with? <i>The changing makeup and key groups within our community</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Census - State of the borough report - Initial desk review of evidence
<p>What do groups want from community engagement? <i>Developing a richer and deeper understanding of community perspectives and how groups want engagement to work</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing research eg Portuguese needs assessment, Eritrean research, Polish and black Caribbean ethnography - Evidence sessions or interviews - Attendance at meetings taking place in the community
<p>How well do we engage now? <i>Developing our understanding of what works and learning from what we do well</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing research eg Equinox report - Desk research looking at good practice elsewhere - Evidence from our community: - Evidence sessions or interviews - Attendance at meetings taking place in the community
<p>What are the barriers to effective engagement? <i>Understanding of why some groups are not engaged, or do not engage</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing research eg Equinox report - Evidence from our community - Evidence sessions or interviews - Attendance at meetings taking place in the community
<p>Opportunities to improve community engagement <i>Identifying new approaches, tools and techniques the council could use</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluations of council projects (eg Neighbourhood Enhancement Programme) - Review of successful approaches by other organisations - Engagement with councillors and officers - Evidence gathered from community interviews and events
<p>Recommendations and tools to support better community engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evidence gathered from above

Key principles for effective community engagement

The conversations the Panel members had were wide-ranging and included community members, leaders, representatives and experts. However there were a number of consistent themes that arose through these conversations about things that work well and opportunities for improvement. These themes underpin the key principles for effective community engagement outlined here, and the Panel suggests that these principles should form the basis for community engagement in Lambeth from now on.

We have open and transparent conversations with residents that reflect our ethos as a borough and offer an equal voice to all

The Panel found that the council engages well with some of its residents, but that this is not consistent. Some communities feel excluded from conversations about changes currently taking place in the borough, even when there have been opportunities to engage, such as public meetings, there is evidence that people feel these opportunities are ‘not for them’. (Some reasons for this are explored below.) Given Lambeth’s commitment to fairness and opportunity for all, and the importance placed by Lambeth’s political administration on equality, it is essential that all our residents are able to engage about issues that matter to them.

Engagement is about building productive and sustainable relationships

The Panel’s work uncovered an interesting difference in the way that councillors and officers tend to think about engagement.

Council officers often regard engagement as an activity that takes place within specific projects, often at a certain stage in a project. They sometimes, though by no means always, regard engagement as being about communicating a change that is going to take place, rather than a more productive two-way exchange which is to the mutual benefit of the resident and the council. Probably because of the nature of their jobs, officers often want to engage about a specific issue, for example a regeneration project or a change to a service.

However councillors tend to see engagement as what they do on a day to day basis: building relationships, making connections between people, supporting people who are contributing to their community, talking to people about what is happening in the borough. Engagement for councillors is often described as talking to people about the issues they care about – rather than a set of specific issues attached to a project, though they can do this too. And, because councillors regard engagement as being about building relationships, councillors tend to see a wide range of different activities as being crucial to community engagement, ranging from community celebration days to Freshview events and anything that sees the council helping the community to come together.

This is an interesting finding, and we are not suggesting that one view is 'better' than the other: clearly councillors and officers have very different roles. However, it would be useful if this difference was recognised, and if officers therefore worked more closely with councillors when both planning and undertaking community engagement. Councillors have relationships and networks with the local community that can provide a very useful starting point for engagement within a project. They also have an understanding of the community they represent which is a valuable source of insight in relation to any specific project of issue the council wants to talk to the community about. Given that the council has lost staff who previously led engagement and held community relationships in recent years, this seems even more important.

Thinking about engagement as building relationships, rather than an occasional activity, would also help address another issue which arose during the panel's work, which is that members of the community can't always see the impact their contribution has made, and do not always receive a follow up communication about what happened next. This can be damaging to trust and undermine relationships. It should be a matter of good practice that the council maintains contact with local people throughout any process, and ensures they are informed about what happened next. It also means that these ongoing relationships can help better cooperation between the council and local people in the longer term, once a specific project is complete.

Finally, the Panel found that the council sometimes underestimates the level of time and investment required to engage effectively with the community. Given the council's commitment to building a more equal partnership with residents as a cooperative council, it is important that good engagement is recognised as a key part of how this will be achieved.

Knowing the community is essential to good engagement

The Council engages well with some people in the community. However the Panel found that in many cases the council does not fully understand the community it wants to work with before it begins the engagement process. For example 10% of the population of Lambeth is Portuguese mother-tongue. There is very little evidence of specific engagement with Portuguese speakers. This shows that although the council holds a great deal of information about local communities – for example the different ethnic groups who live in the borough and where they are based, the languages spoken, the socio-economic status of different communities and so on - it does not use this to shape engagement.

Councillors can often add to this picture with a more nuanced understanding of the community – its needs, who the community leaders are, who is already active and engaged and so on. However, although there are exceptions, this information is not routinely used to form the basis for planning engagement, even when that engagement is focused on a geographic area.

In addition, the Panel found that the council is good at carrying out interesting and insightful research into the needs and preference of different groups (for example in recent years the council has conducted research into the Polish, Portuguese and Black Caribbean communities), and often uses ethnographic research to plan engagement or even activities with these communities. However, best use is not being made of this research. We found that awareness of this research is low internally, it is generally not used to inform engagement planning and recommendations are not always acted upon. This also contributes to undermining valuable relationships that have been built up through research, and contributes to the lack of consistency that people observed.

Good planning and coordination is key to effective engagement

The panel found that there is poor coordination of community engagement across the Council, and that activities can appear to be ad hoc and leave people feeling let down. If the council does not coordinate it will struggle to build productive and sustainable relationships, as detailed above.

Good planning involves:

- **Being clear about the scope of any engagement activity, and leaving the door open for future conversations.** The panel found that expectations can be raised unrealistically, if there is a lack of clarity or explanation about how and when decisions will be made, and who by. There were also concerns that the Council consults regularly on relatively small issues, but these rarely add up to a bigger picture. Officers need to make better use of one another's networks so that the conversation between the Council and the community is part of one big meaningful conversation rather than lots of small conversations that do not add up to a 'whole'. Councillors can help here.
- **Making time to feed back to participants the results of any community engagement activities, and any materials arising such as minutes or actions.** The panel found that it is difficult for people to trust that they have been listened to or that their views have been heard, if officers do not feed back.
- **Taking into account how people prefer to engage.** This is in some ways an obvious point, but the Panel heard concerns from the community that methods of engagement do not always respond to people's needs and preferences. For example there is an overreliance on public meetings and workshops, but the Panel heard that many people find these intimidating and encounter cultural and language barriers that prevent their participation. Instead, it was suggested that the council should go to 'where the community is' – for example places where people come together such as places of worship, cafes and school gates. In some cases it will be necessary to go beyond this, in cases where people are particularly 'hard to reach' – for example if they are isolated.

- **Taking account barriers to engagement, such as language.** Finally, the Panel heard concerns that language barriers are a significant barrier to engagement, and heard some interesting suggestions of ways in which these barriers can be overcome. In some cases translation of key documents and websites can be important. In other cases, community advocates or leaders can sometimes engage on behalf of the council, reaching further into the community than traditional methods are able to. The council does have a [translation and interpretation policy](#).



Recommendations

Figure 1: Recommendations of the Lambeth Cabinet Community Engagement Panel

	Recommendation	Impact
1.1	Develop a community engagement toolkit for councillors, officers and citizens	Councillors, officers and citizens are better equipped to reach more people
1.2	Develop core training programme for relevant officers and all councillors to be rolled out from autumn 2015	Officers and councillors are confident in undertaking community engagement, and we have a common approach
2.1	Develop better community contact databases for Lambeth and make better use of existing networks	Councillors and officers are able to share information on their contacts and networks, ensuring we can reach a wider group of people
2.2	Publish key officer and councillor contact details, responsibilities and networks. Provide signposting materials to community organisations	Ward councillors are better supported with the information they need to engage communities in their wards Citizens can connect with the right people – councillors and officers, and have a better understanding of the democratic process
3.1	Council to develop in-house team with responsibility for community engagement to develop and share best practice, provide training, and support for officers, councillors and citizens	The quality of community engagement improves, and we have more consistency in our approach. The council widens its networks, reaching beyond the usual suspects The council is less reliant on consultants, reducing costs and ensuring that knowledge and relationships developed through engagement activity is retained by the council
3.2	Develop an knowledge information base collecting together what we know about different communities, to support councillors, officers and citizens	Councillors and officers have easier access to all the research and citizen insight we currently hold on Lambeth’s communities. Councillors, officers and citizens are better informed

4.1	Ensure resources and capacity are available to support engagement with communities for whom language is a barrier	Officers and councillors are able to work together in practical ways and engage successfully with a wider section of the community eg Portuguese-speaking community
4.2	Continue to grow stronger and more sustainable relationships and partnerships with community organisations and consider providing training and resources to ensure that they participate successfully and build their own networks	Officers and councillors have 'go to' organisations and networks in the community that they can coproduce and collaborate with
5.1	The Council to map and publish all available meeting spaces in the borough and keep up to date	Meeting spaces are vital for new community groups. Councillors are able to support new community groups by suggesting places for them to meet.
5.2	Develop new, less bureaucratic, ways for councillors and community groups to gather equalities information.	The council has better information on who we are, and are not engaging, to drive further improvements