What is community engagement?

Community engagement is the process of empowering local people so they can get involved and influence decisions. Within the definition of community engagement there are different levels of involvement:

- **Empowering** - residents are empowered to fully engage in decision making and implement their own plans as partners in delivery
- **Collaborating** - residents are in partnership with services / decision makers in each aspect of the decision making
- **Consulting** - residents are asked for feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions
- **Informing** - residents are presented with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding, alternatives, options and/or solutions

Objective

The structure of formal committee meetings is not conducive to achieving future engagement and the Council need to listen, interact and engage with people where they are, on their terms and in ways that are now open to us all. This will be achieved through the increased community engagement opportunities offered by Community Forums and Street Forums. Greater emphasis will also be placed on social media as not only a communication channel but also a real means of engagement.

Community Forums

The Leader’s report introduces Community Forums as the key focus for engagement, providing high visibility of the Council in the community and enabling Ward Members to act as Community Champions. This new approach will enable flexibility and the ability to identify solutions to local needs working together with the community to resolve issues. Forums will be themed around an area of concern to local people.

There will usually be three Forums scheduled into the Municipal calendar per year.

**The first Community Forum** - The first South of the Borough Community Forum is on the evening of Tuesday 10 November, at Tolworth Girls School. In consultation with the Neighbourhood Committee Chair and Vice Chair, and with consideration to issues currently affecting the Neighbourhood, it is being planned that the first Forum will consider the theme of Planning and Development Control. The first meeting will include some time at the beginning introducing the changes to the Neighbourhoods and determining at the end if the format of the Forum is how local people want to engage.

Suggested themes for future forums include environmental matters, policing and community safety, and health. The theme for each Forum will be chosen by the Neighbourhood Chair / Vice Chair working with the Neighbourhood Manager and will respond to local people’s priorities.

Once the theme is chosen key relevant organisations, officers and Lead Members/Portfolio Holders will receive a formal, personal invite to take part in the Forum. A wider, open invite will be extended to the whole community.
We will look to develop online forums as part of taking the new arrangements forward, building on the Neighbourhood’s Facebook group and maximising its capacity for engagement.

**Street Forums**

Ward based street forums will be held up to twice a year in each ward, with the aim of Members engaging with residents on the streets and identifying where there are issues of concern.

How the street forums will run in each ward will be determined by the local ward Members working with the Neighbourhood Manager. Flexibility will be key so as to maximise the opportunity for face to face engagement - this could include tapping into an existing community event or meeting, organising a street walkabout or meeting in a local venue. The format of the street forums may also be influenced by the time of year and can take place in the week (day or evening) or at the weekend, as appropriate.

**Young people**

Young people need to be involved but they may not wish to attend a Community Forum. Ensuring their views are fed in may mean addressing separately but linked with the Community Forums so that young people’s views are fed into the debate. Street forums that specifically target young people and particularly at events such as Celebrating Chessington where lots of young people attend would be an ideal opportunity to engage with them. In addition we will work through the Achieving for Children Service and schools to maximise young people’s engagement in the Neighbourhood.

**Existing engagement**

To avoid duplication there are existing engagement mechanisms that work well and will continue to complement the new arrangements.

The Business Forums provides an opportunity for engagement with local businesses, as a networking event and to provide business support. Generally attendance at the meetings is low but we shall continue to build on this to ensure local businesses are engaged with the Neighbourhood.

Attendance and support for community events such as Celebrating Chessington and Remembrance Sunday will also continue.

**Communication**

The new arrangements will require a communications campaign that will promote the Community Forums and Street Forums widely across the Neighbourhood using a variety of methods including social media. Working with the Communications Team, a new brand will be created to promote the Forums and this will be used widely in publicity and promotional material, to ensure the new arrangements are a success. There is no new additional funding for this work, so it will need to be met from existing base budgets.