

## **Engaging with Kingston's communities**

This framework outlines the council's proposed approach to community engagement to support the commitment to 'hardwire' effective engagement into decision-making. The council is clear about its ambition to improve community engagement. This will require culture change across the whole council and the framework will help shape that change.

The corporate plan - Making Kingston Better, Together - outlines our ambition for community engagement: "We want to be known as a council that is an exemplar for community engagement. We are far from that at the moment but in this new era for the council, we are focusing on strengthening the relationship between the council and the community - residents, businesses, students, voluntary and community groups. Kingston has a vibrant and engaged voluntary sector which creates opportunities to maximise community participation. We want to 'hardwire' effective engagement into our decision making - involving residents early on in the design of local services and the things that affect them."

The Corporate Peer Review (January 2019) acknowledged that it is clear that the Administration is committed to improving community engagement. The report called for leadership on the issue and to clearly articulate what it is that we need to do differently. The community engagement framework aims to set out the markers for what the council needs to do and how we shape a new approach and culture across the organisation. It sets out a framework for a common understanding to improve engagement by setting principles and standards for how the council engages - to build clear, shared expectations that enable a focus on what can be achieved.

Using the framework as a guide, we will improve our approach to engaging people to provide more opportunities to hear more voices earlier in the process. We are working across the council to try a number of different ways of engaging people - and a key part of our approach will be testing new methods and new opportunities. We appreciate that we have a lot to do to make this a reality and this framework outlines the commitment we are making for the next three years..

The council is clear about its ambition to improve community engagement. This will require culture change across the whole council. To help achieve this there is a need for clarity about what this means. Over the past 12 months there have been some good examples of successful community engagement and there have been other examples where we can learn and develop our approach.

This revised approach means that we need to get better at all the elements of engaging - from the basics - such as providing clear information - through to introducing new ways for residents to participate in decision making, like participatory budgeting, open

democracy platforms and Citizens' Assemblies. At one end of the spectrum (inform) this is simply about being much clearer in the language we use and the communications we produce (eg reviewing correspondence such as letters/emails and information on the website) through to introducing new ways for communities and businesses to participate in redesigning services and places (using methods such as community budgeting, open democracy online platforms and Citizens' Assemblies).

## **Communities**

Communities can be broadly split into:

Communities of place - defined by location (such as an area, a street, an estate, a ward, a pub or community centre).

Communities of interest - defined by a shared interest or experience which might include tenants and resident groups, allotment holders, people involved in environmental projects, or people who come together to use services such as parks, green spaces, or community buildings.

Communities of identity' - defined by those people, such as ethnic groups, people who share a particular experience, interest or stake in an issue, or characteristics such as young people, older people, disabled people, ethnic groups, or lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender people or other common bonds such as student or business communities.

## **What we can achieve together**

We want to ensure we are doing the best we can at every point on the engagement framework - Inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower - by:

- Increasing the scope of community engagement to help ensure everyone has a voice, especially people we seldom hear from
- Having a clearly articulated approach

- Ensuring we co-ordinate community engagement and consultation so people have time and space to have a say on what matters to them
- Encouraging better decision-making and problem-solving by hearing more ideas and voices earlier in the process.

Through an agreed approach the council will:

- Increase and strengthen the role of communities in how we live, work and study in Kingston
- Involve more people in the democratic process and enable communities to influence decisions in a range of ways
- Support communities to take action by helping them identify needs and support them to develop their own solutions
- Measures that enable us to be held to account about our effectiveness.

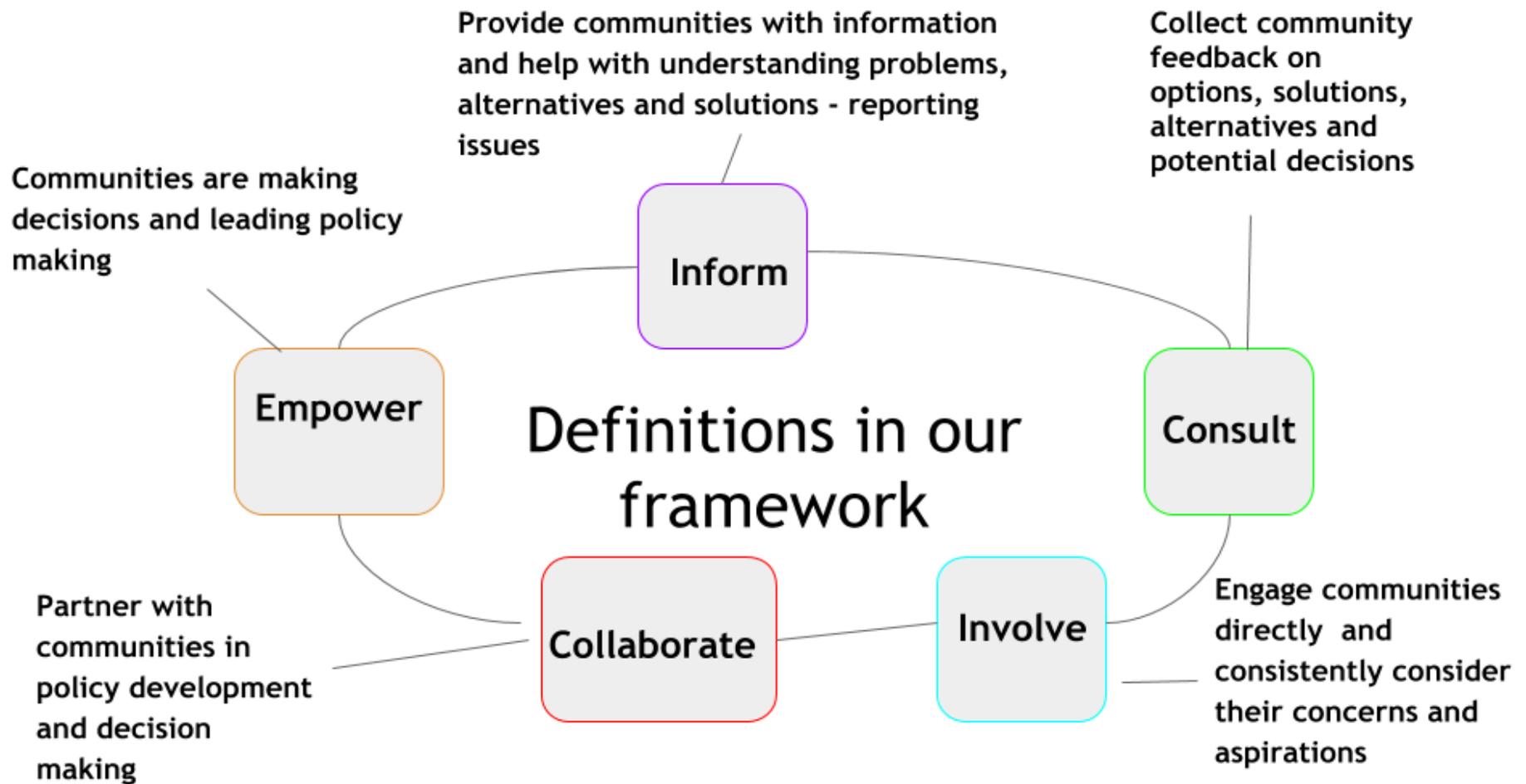
## **Ways of engaging**

The framework outlines a five stage approach to engagement - inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower - using the International Association for Public Participation - iap2 - spectrum of public participation.

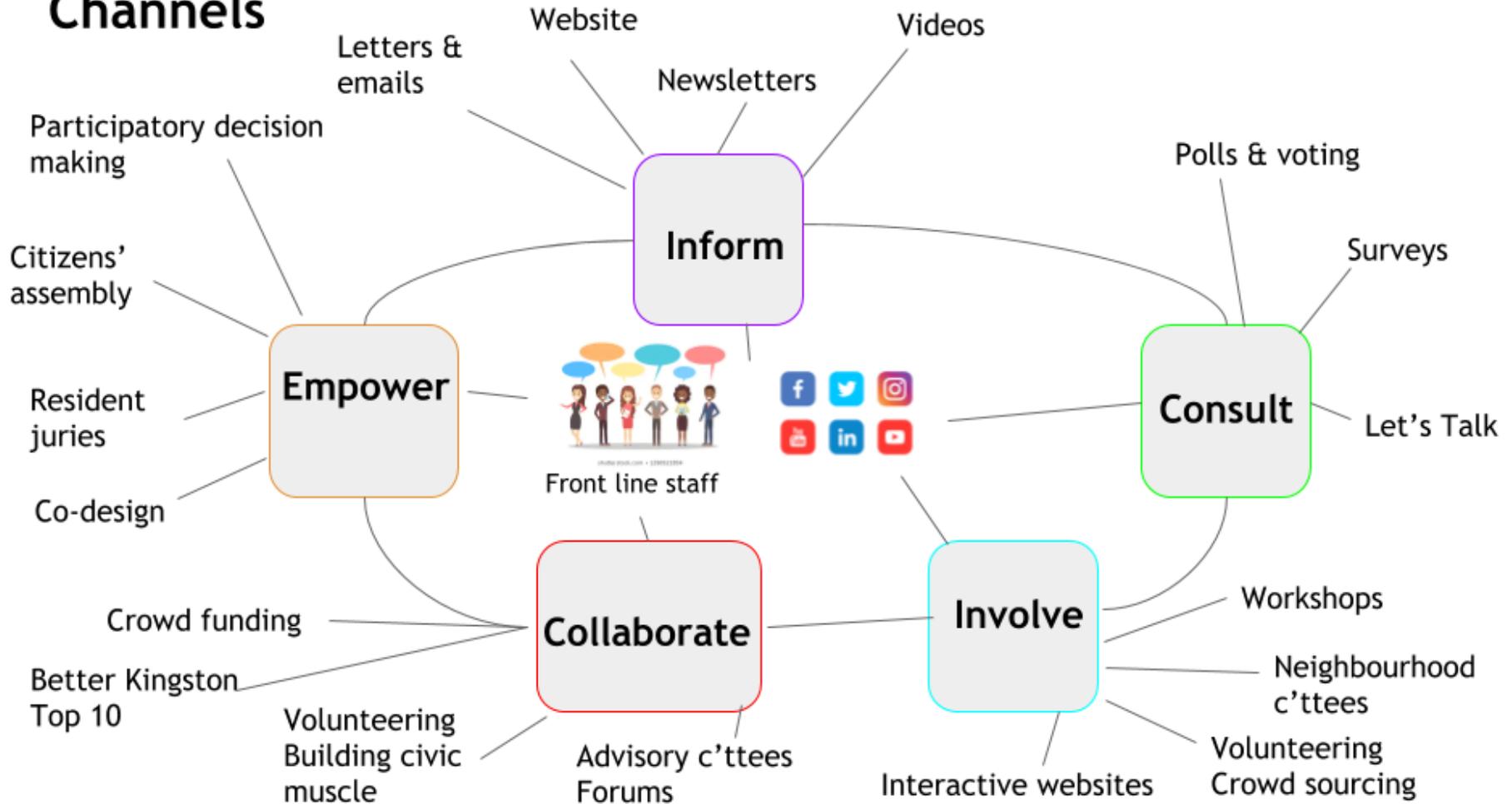
Using the framework as a basis, the council aims to improve all stages of engagement making engagement as easy as possible. At one end of the spectrum (inform) this is simply about being much clearer in the language we use and the communications we produce (eg reviewing correspondence such as letters/emails and information on the website). At the other it is a much more immersive experience and we will be introducing new ways for communities and businesses to participate in redesigning services and places (using methods such as community budgeting, co-design, open democracy online platforms and Citizens' Assemblies).

We made some progress over the past 12 months in changing how we have carried out engagement and to support our ambitions in involving communities. For example we are currently holding workshops with people across the borough about redesigning our website and improving customer experience. We have also increased the focus on neighbourhood engagement through more local decision making, more local allocation of resources and more opportunities to hear voices.

## **Definitions of the stages of community engagement**

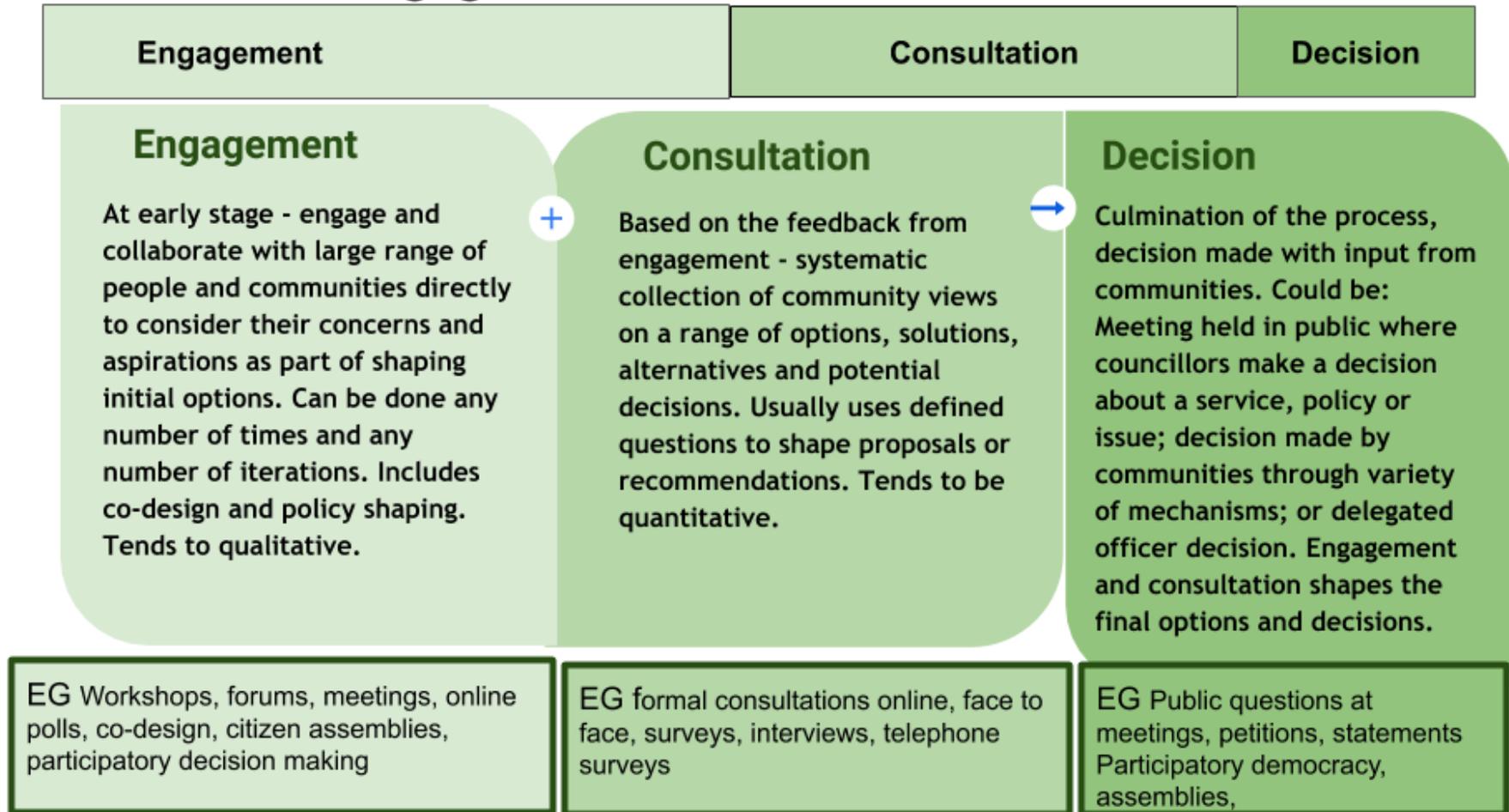


# Channels



How engagement supports decision making

# Engagement to enable decisions



## Our Engagement Commitments:

- Involving people** - Encouraging and supporting communities to be involved in issues that matter to them
- Being clear** - Working openly, honestly and with integrity with communities to help shape services
  - Ensuring information is clear and easy to find
- Listening** - Demonstrating a genuine willingness to listen and be influenced
  - Working creatively with communities to hear the voices that we don't hear so often
- Changing** - Showing what has changed - and what hasn't - as a result of engagement and explaining why
  - Supporting communities with the tools that enable them to lead change.
- Learning** - Keep learning and trying new tactics so we continue to improve and learn from best practice elsewhere
- Taking time** - Making sure communities have enough time to engage effectively
- Engaging and Sharing** - Sharing why we are engaging and make it easy for people from all communities

## **Making engagement real - some of the things we will do:**

Some of the activities outlined below can be achieved relatively quickly - others will take longer. The overall time frame is that the activity will be achieved in the next three years.

## **Involving people - Encouraging and helping communities to be involved in issues that matter to them**

- Use the Let's Talk face to face facilitated conversations across the borough to understand more about community priorities and engage people in the budgeting process.
- Take conversations to people where they usually meet in engaging ways and using clear language to help us hear a range of views.
- Introduce a community budgeting approach where we can have conversations with people about how we allocate budgets to match priorities. These can be both face to face and online. The aim is to ultimately work together with communities to develop council plans and commission services (where appropriate), including jointly delivered services.
- Use co-production more extensively in commissioning.
- Increasingly use community plans and forums to decide local priorities and design services, this places communities at the heart of deciding priorities and services and making decisions.
- Carry out an air quality citizens' assembly to help tackle the issue in Kingston. This involves involving people in an in-depth discussion of a subject for a number of days to look at ideas, options and possible solutions.
- Use 'Top 10' online voting platform to establish topic for the State of the Borough debate that could bring real change and shape the future.
- Identifying ways to improve how we engage more effectively with two key communities in particular - businesses and young people.

## **Being clear - Working openly, honestly and with integrity with communities to help shape services and ensuring information is clear and easy to find**

- Review information on the website to ensure it's clear and easy to read. Customers Services are working with residents and communities to shape and redesign the functionality of the web site.
- Work with staff in libraries and other public facing roles to ensure they have consistent information and messaging for residents who want face to face information as well as support in getting online.
- Let's Talk - provide opportunities for communities to be involved - giving dates of decisions, feedback and opportunities.

- Reviewing information that goes out to residents to make sure it is clear and easy to understand, for example letters and information about highways, planning and other services.
- Increasing transparency by making data and information accessible through an open data portal and putting more of the data we have online - making this easy to use.
- Review and develop our channels - for example establish a residents e-newsletter, work to make consultation portal clearer and more user friendly.
- Neighbourhood Committees - Increasing ability to take decisions about local issues with the resources to respond to local issues. Greater flexibility to engage with communities in different ways.

**Listening - Demonstrating a genuine willingness to listen and be influenced and Working creatively with communities to hear the voices that we don't hear so often**

- Use new methods to ensure we reach groups whose voices we don't hear - an example would be establishing links with the Korean community to engage in the New Malden plan.
- Support councillors to promote opportunities to get involved in local activities and decision-making around the neighbourhood committees and ward events.
- Work with the Youth Parliament, the university and others including AfC to improve how we engage with young people, learning and building on ways of engaging with young people on the Cambridge Road Estate.
- Work with businesses to improve how we are engaging with them through representative bodies as well as individual businesses.
- Target activity to reach people who don't always have time to engage such as commuters and families to help them give views on issues that are important to them.
- Establish more effective ways in which we can share feedback from residents that's shared with staff ie from libraries and other public facing services to help us improve what we do.

**Engaging and Sharing - share why we are engaging and make it easy for people from all communities**

- Review formats for engagement in liaison with communities to ensure they meet needs - and offer options tailored to help people engage - in different languages and in different ways, working with community leaders and the voluntary and faith sector.
- Develop a consultation and involvement calendar that lists all opportunities to get involved in consultation and engagement activity and avoids duplication.

- Support engagement with high profile communications to help raise awareness of how to get involved - also demonstrating how the council has changed its approach to embed engagement into all it does.

### **Changing - Showing what has changed, and what hasn't, as a result of engagement and explaining why. Supporting communities with the tools that enable them to lead change**

- Establish clear feedback loop that ensures people know what has happened as a result of their feedback - website, social media, email contact when possible, information included in committee reports.
- Through on-going work with commissioning establish tools and processes that enable communities to manage local budgets and services.
- Ensure engagement is carried out at the start of the process of reshaping services or managing issues so that decision making is informed by feedback.
- Develop a crowdfunding option that helps communities raise funds to support activities.

### **Learning - Keep learning from engagement and trying new methods so we can continue to improve for the future**

- Review all engagement activity to learn and improve for the future
- Establish measures for success at the start of activity - enabling us to modify activity.
- Try new tools and techniques to continually improve who we are engaging with people.

### **Taking time - make sure communities have enough time to engage effectively**

- Have a clear and publicised plan that enables us to schedule engagement and people know when they will have an opportunity to engage,
- Ensure there is sufficient time for meaningful engagement built into the decision making timetable.

### **There are a number of documents that will be developed to support this framework:**

An annually updated delivery plan to show how we will implement the framework

A Community Engagement toolkit - to support engagement with communities

Community Engagement Website to help co-ordinate engagement activity - [kingstonletstalk.co.uk/](http://kingstonletstalk.co.uk/)

### **How will we know if we're successful**

Year one (further years being developed)

- We will introduce new initiatives to engage residents:
  - A citizens' assembly and a range of engagement activity will have shaped a clean air plan for the borough.
  - The annual State of the borough debate topic will have been determined by residents and have clear ambitions for the future.
  - We will have held a number of Let's Talk sessions around budgeting and setting priorities
  - We will have developed a process for community budgeting
  - Each of the neighbourhoods will have a community plans developed by and with residents - and will have started to implement activities as a result
  - The voluntary, community and faith sector will be able to have a higher profile in engagement should they wish to facilitated by the council
  - We will have increased engagement with young people and with businesses.
- By the time we come to making decisions we have already had extensive community input and and in some instances co-design. Evidenced through information about engagement in committee reports.
- We'll complete the annual residents survey to measure the number of residents who feel engaged, informed and satisfied.
- We will have gathered evidence of the different groups of people who are providing feedback - and who may not have engaged with us in the past.
- We will have fewer complaints about how we engage and inform people - and more positive feedback.
- The number of people taking part in consultations has increased.
- We will have introduced a residents newsletter (electronic) to help keep residents informed and engaged.
- A toolkit to help engagement will have been co-designed and used.

