

Update to Motion

Consultation in the Royal Borough

Proposed by Councillor Jason Hughes

Seconded by Councillor Ian George

Background

Effective consultation is the lifeblood of healthy local democracy, not only in its delivery but also its public perception to honestly engender and maintain the trust of communities. Resident participation in decision-making is critical to the responsible and expedient delivery of local government services. This imperative extends beyond the ballot box every four years. It is a continuous journey of consultation and engagement to ensure that reflecting residents' priorities, achieving value for money and providing excellent service delivery are at the epicentre of the Royal Borough's activities.

To this end, words must be matched by deeds. The Royal Borough has more to do to reflect this aspiration and to make it a reality.

This Council notes: -

1. The fundamental difference between 'consultation' and 'engagement' as vital disciplines in local government, the former is a component of the latter, specifically it recognises that: -
 - a. Consultation involves obtaining residents' feedback on proposals as a *corollary* of engagement and should regularly consult communities on long, medium and short-term plans, to appropriately determine the Council's strategic direction, set its budgets and prioritise projects;
 - b. Engagement is the broader ongoing process of *sharing* information with residents and to seek feedback with the core objective of involving communities in the decision-making process, and that consultation is the *formal process* to meet the Council's statutory and regulatory requirements;
2. That trusted, effective and efficient consultation is needed now more than ever **given** the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic;
3. According to the Council's most recent Residents' Survey, the majority of residents *do not* believe that it seeks their views before taking decisions;
4. *Only a third* of residents believe that the Council acts on residents' concerns;
5. The majority of residents *do not* believe that the Council explains the decisions it takes;
6. The Council's **Communities** and Engagement Committee is a toothless body which does not look at, or provide oversight to, consultations in the Royal Borough;
7. The Council's approach to consultation is disparate and fragmented across council departments, lacking centralisation and a dedicated core with strategic focus;
8. The recent absence of any meaningful consultation with residents on the imposition of Low Traffic Neighbourhood trials;
9. The vast difference in quality of recent important consultation efforts, specifically on the Cambridge Road Estate and Cumberland House regeneration schemes, the latter of which is a primary poor example which has understandably shaken residents' confidence in the Royal Borough's consultation efforts.

This Council resolves to: -

1. Continually seek to adopt and exemplify best practice in consultation, by joining the Consultation Institute;
2. Conduct a comprehensive audit of the capabilities, competences and resources of all relevant committees and operations across council departments, including the training of relevant officers, committee chairmen and members;
3. Reconfigure the **Communities** and Engagement Committee to ensure that it examines, approves and reviews all consultations on significant Council activities in highways, parking and planning with the following thresholds set at: -
 - a. All highways, parking and traffic schemes in excess of £50,000 cost;
 - b. And all proposed residential developments exceeding ten new units;
4. Consolidate all consultation delivery by council officers into a dedicated and centralised 'Consultation Team', removing disparate and fragmented consultation delivery in individual departments with a view to making cost savings or cost neutrality;
5. Set up a Consultation Team which will be a part of the Chief Executive's Department, but with separate management arrangements from communications to reflect the different disciplines of consultation and engagement/communications;
6. Enhance the examination of the new consultation arrangements, as above, via a more comprehensive revamp of the Council's Residents' Survey and to review at the **Communities** and Engagement Committee, reporting back to Full Council, one year after adoption.