

**Council 23 November 2020**  
**Motions**

**Motion: Formulating a Public Consultation Policy and Framework in the London Borough of Sutton**

**Proposer: Cllr Catherine Gray**

**Seconder: Cllr Neil Garratt**

**Background**

Sutton Council talks a good game on consultation, but consistently fails to deliver actions or projects based on effective and worthwhile consultation. Recent and current consultations are proving to be mere lip service, with decisions often based on skewed surveys and designed to create the outcome the administration desires, rather than reflecting the outcomes favoured by residents. This has led to unprecedented disaffection with residents, and is tarnishing the Council's reputation.

A motion presented to Council on 29 April 2019 that called for a root and branch overhaul of the way the Council consults was voted down by the Liberal Democrat administration. Everything was fine, Lib Dem councillors claimed in debate.

Yet just over one week later, on 8 May 2019, at Scrutiny Committee, it was suddenly admitted that all was not, in fact, well with Sutton's approach. In response to a question about the failures surrounding the parking strategy consultation, it was announced that the Council was 'reviewing the consultation framework, considering when and how engagement with residents should be carried out and any changes recommended by this committee and through this review will be presented to the Strategy and Resources Committee for agreement.'

And what has happened since this review was announced?

Nothing.

The review seems to have been abandoned, and the now admittedly discredited consultation methods continue to be used.

The current consultation on the effects of the introduction of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods is a case in point. The highly-skewed questions created by the Council only allow residents to provide positive or neutral answers to deeply flawed assertions, producing an outcome that can only ever give one outcome. This is an outcome that overwhelmingly contradicts the true feelings of residents, and which renders the Council a laughing stock and creates resentment and anger among residents across the borough.

It is time for the Council to take seriously the importance of effective and meaningful consultation with residents, stakeholders and its strategic partners. We live in a great

borough; listening properly to our residents, and acting with their wishes at heart, will make Sutton an even better place to live.

The council notes:

- The current approach to resident, stakeholder and strategic partner consultation is not working. The political administration blocked a motion at Council in April 2019, then performed a U-turn and proposed a full review of the consultation framework at Scrutiny Committee just one week later. This promised review has not been taken further.
- The Council's own resident surveys, from 2017 and 2019, note that in many instances nearly 9 out of 10 residents did not feel informed or engaged about initiatives, programmes, and plans, including the vital Sutton Plan.
- Councillors in charge of new initiatives or policies where there is widespread resident concern have repeatedly failed or avoided engaging on the burgeoning and increasingly important and influential public platforms such as Facebook (with a few notable exceptions). Policy announcements have been made on social media platforms such as Twitter to as little as 500 followers rather than on local Facebook groups with in excess of 5,000 or 10,000 members. This lack of engagement coupled with a failing consultation policy has angered residents and created an atmosphere in which trust in local politicians and representatives is diminishing.

The Council resolves to:

- Remember that as the Council we work for the people in the borough, we do not lord over them
- Develop and create an overarching framework and inclusive consultation strategy that will help to create a strong two-way relationship between the council and the community, which is currently lacking. Such a comprehensive and flexible strategy would further mitigate any legal challenges to decisions ultimately taken by the Council.
- Develop and establish appropriate levels of resident- and ward councillor-led consultation panels within any such framework, assisted by officers, both on a ward basis, local area basis, or borough-wide basis, dependent on the local impact of proposed measures requiring consultation.
- Ensure the policy and framework meets the needs of all communities and recognises the different means of communication required by certain groups of people, such as the elderly or those without access to digital communications platforms.
- Engage actively with external partners such as Age UK, Citizens Advice and Community Action Sutton, to learn how best the Council can engage with those least likely to participate but who are most affected by Council initiatives and programmes requiring consultation.

- Establish a higher and more realistic and representative threshold for the quantity and quality of consultation responses required before further action on matters being consulted on can be formulated.
- Establish a task and finish group under the auspices of S&R to conduct a comprehensive audit of capabilities, competences and resources of all relevant committees and operations across council departments, including training of relevant officers, committee chairmen and members.
- To join the Consultation Institute in order to adopt and exemplify best practice in consultations.

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