

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Assessment 1

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London Borough of Sutton

Introduction

Located in the southwest part of Greater London, Sutton has a population of 209,517 people according to the ONS's mid-2021 population data. Annual population growth for 2020 - 2021 in the London Borough of Sutton has been recorded as 0.7 per cent. Sutton spans over an area of 17 square miles and has a population density of 4,778 persons per square kilometre, as per recent population estimates collected in mid-2021.

As established by 2021 census, 68 per cent of Sutton's residents are of white origins and the remaining 32 per cent consist of non-white minorities.

In 2021, the average age in Sutton was 39.6, of which just above 80 per cent consisted of people aged 18 and over. Christians account for 46 per cent of the residents in Sutton.

85.7 per cent of Sutton residents speak English as their primary language, and 12 per cent speak it well or very well. 1.7 per cent claimed to have weak English language abilities, and the remaining 0.3 per cent had no command of English at all (Varbes, 2021).

London Borough of Sutton is under the authority of Sutton Council led by the Liberal Democrats with 29 seats followed by the Conservatives with 20 seats and Labour Party and independent candidates with three seats respectively (as per 2022 elections) (Talora, 2022).

This essay explores the prevalent issues faced by Sutton Council community as well as the council's methods of engaging, collaborating and implementing stakeholders' feedback.

Engaging and collaborating with the local community

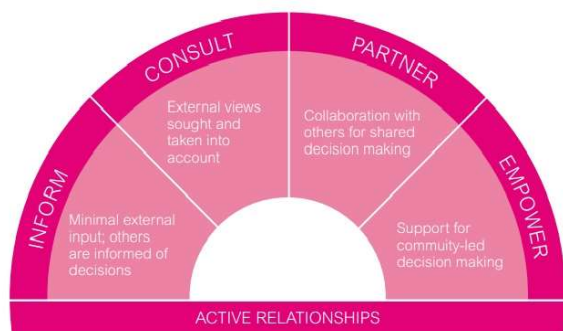


Figure 1. Engagement Spectrum

“Engagement is a multidimensional and relational concept with cognitive, affective, and behavioral attributes that lead to connection, participation, and involvement” (Johnston, 2010). Through involvement, community engagement tries to address socially located challenges affecting varied community groups and environments.

Relationships between organizations and communities are established through com

munication and interaction, and through the co-creation of value for stakeholders (Johnston, Lane, 2019).

According to the Local Government Act 1999, all councils are required to consult stakeholders, including residents, local businesses, service users and those with an interest in the area about the decisions they make, to ensure continued improvements in their service delivery methods. The Local Government Act 2000 has called for councils to implement community strategies, highlighting the importance of public involvement to the success of community planning and partnership work (Sutton Council, 2008).

Sutton council vision is of building an inclusive community where residents can take part and take pride. The council's approach to engaging with stakeholders and ensuring their views are taken into consideration and implemented within services is depicted in the "Community engagement strategy" paper from 2008.

Residents, service users, companies, and other stakeholders can participate in decision-making through a variety of channels provided by Sutton Council.

Councillors:

- Represent the borough's 18 wards and maintain regular appointments where citizens can discuss concerns.

local committees:

- Serving North Cheam and Worcester Park; Sutton South, Cheam and Belmont; Sutton Local; St Helier, The Wrythe and Wandle Valley; Carshalton and Clockhouse; and Beddington and Wallington.

Citizens and members of the community or interested organisations are invited to attend and engage in debates about local services. Ward councillors, along with appointed advisors, attend meetings with local committees regularly to discuss local issues. All local committees have a capital budget that can be utilised to improve the environment in the community.

To contact stakeholders, the council may utilise the following methods. The consultation approach chosen will be determined by the sort of consultation.

- Council website
- Library and council offices
- Notices in local newspapers
- E-mails and letters (using a database of interested stakeholders)
- Leaflets and response forms
- Referendums
- Letters to residents
- Site notices
- Community workshops and meetings
- Staffed exhibitions
- Committee meetings

- Notice boards
- Hotlines
- Social media

Safer Sutton Partnership Service – Safer Neighbourhood teams

This service is a collaboration between the London Borough of Sutton and the Metropolitan Police. The service aims to work with residents and talk to them about ongoing issues affecting their security (vandalism, graffiti, anti-social behaviour etc.). Met Police, residents, and relevant services seek lasting solutions to these problems.

The Planning Service – Development Control

The council ensures information regarding new developments is timely and clearly presented to the affected public/ organisations and takes stakeholders' recommendations when deciding on approval of development applications.

Residents can have an impact on service distribution by sharing their views through the following:

- Scrutiny committees - These panels consist of councillors who are not representatives of the Executive. They evaluate the Executive's actions and assist in service improvements by conducting investigations similar to those undertaken by legislative select committees. Public members can both propose topics for the scrutiny committees and engage in the investigations.
- Forums – web-based forums on the council's website which inform members of the public of current affairs and allow them to share views on these.
- Friends Groups - Friends clubs play an important role in developing ties between commercial and non-profit organisations. They want to know what citizens think about their local facilities and how they might assist enhance them.
- Youth Parliament - Sutton Youth Parliament serves to allow youngsters in the council area to have their voices heard. It is made up of students from local schools that meet monthly to talk about issues affecting young people in the region and to help identify solutions. The organisation interacts with local MPs, school principals, and social services to express their concerns.
- Customer Services Customer Focus Group - On a quarterly basis, a cross-section of citizens meets with Council management to offer feedback on the ease of access to the Council's services. The organisation represents elderly persons, carers, the visually and auditory challenged, and religious groups. Despite its emphasis on availability, the group also assists the Council in testing innovative ideas across a variety of services.

Consultation principles

The council's consultation approach is based on four principles:

- Coordination

Coordination aims to avoid duplication by appropriately arranging engagement tasks between the council and external partners and Giving top-down oversight to guarantee that participation influences services and plans.

- Access

Consider different stakeholders' needs and make services available and accessible for all.

- Clarity

When there is a genuine possibility for individuals to influence decisions and services, engagement and consultation mechanisms should be employed. They should be realistic, provide good value, and be transparent and honest about their goals. Participants should receive feedback, and they must be aware of the information in which they have agreed to participate. Communicate with important stakeholders or representative groups ahead of certain consultations or engagement activities to provide advance notice and solicit feedback on the most effective ways of publicity.

- Trust

Implement the Freedom of information act in engagement activities. Participants should be made aware that activities are voluntary and they could withdraw should they wish to do so. Information obtained through participation should be honest and correctly understood. Participants should be treated fairly and with respect.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

The London Borough of Sutton has a clear social and legislative responsibility to prevent discrimination and advance equality. They commit to fulfilling their legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and any other subsequent legislation relating to equality, including upholding the Public Sector Equality Duty. They also commit to being a learning organisation when it comes to equality, diversity and inclusion, reflecting on feedback from residents and staff, and addressing new issues as they arise.

The Equality Duty (created by the Equality Act 2010) requires public bodies to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't. It also requires public bodies to set and publish equality objectives and publish information to show compliance.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework (2019-20, 2023-24) outlines the Council's commitment to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering good relations in Sutton over the next four years. It complements and reflects the key priorities set out in London Borough of Sutton's Corporate Plan.

The Sutton Fairness Commission oversees that all parts of society benefit from residing in Sutton. It serves as a sounding board for partners, soliciting advice and feedback on its services, policies, and commissioning procedures. **The Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Steering Group** advises and assists the Corporate Management Team in the development and execution of equality and diversity strategies, policies, and guidance.

Ambitious for Sutton

As of 2023 Sutton Council has developed a five-year plan (Sutton Council, 2023) outlining strategies for tackling issues faced by the borough. The plan consists of six steps for a better borough putting residents and local businesses into the spotlight. The six steps are as follows:

- **Action on climate change**
Climate goals, financing possibilities, and innovation should be reflected in the Environment Strategy and Climate Emergency Response Plan. A Climate Finance Plan should be designed in order to achieve £1 million in external financing every year. Municipal infrastructure should indeed be made more energy-efficient and environmentally friendly. The Green Enterprise Partnership in Sutton will assist 50 businesses in reducing their environmental impact, lobbying the government to meet their national commitments, encouraging people to choose sustainable transportation, identifying possibilities for growing the amount of electric vehicle charging points, minimising waste and working towards a 'circular economy, educating and enforcing fly-tipping, littering, dog fouling, and other violations. Develop the Sutton Decentralised Energy Network (SDEN), create and implement flood prevention strategies in Worcester Park, Rosehill Park, and Beddington, keep implementing the Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems development programme in the council's schools, implement use of LED street lighting, raise sustainability and climate change awareness, encourage active lifestyles through updating playgrounds, tennis courts, and other park facilities
- **An inclusive place for everyone**
The goal of this step is to keep advocating inclusion and equality in order to make Sutton a welcoming community for our various communities and give priority to mental health and supportive communities. Give care and assistance to those in most need and encourage individuals to be as self-sufficient as possible. These can be achieved through collaboration with organizations to enhance mental health and wellbeing, produce policy changes for children and young people with special education needs and impairments, implement guidance for children and young people throughout health and social care, minimise childhood levels of obesity, optimise youth provision, reshape mental health support, encourage active living, ensure all adult social care services adhere to the highest standards of delivery, and establish an Enablement Service for adults with learning disabilities. Ensure residents from all backgrounds are included.
- **Quality and affordable housing**

The ambitions of this step are to build new houses, revitalise council estates, and find creative methods to boost the borough's affordable housing supply. Maintain safe, sustainable, and high-quality Council housing. Collaborate with partners to provide timely help to homeless or at-risk persons.

The Sutton Housing Association is implementing a five-year investment strategy aimed at ensuring that all Council homes meet the most recent safety and quality standards. They will renovate 60 homes with energy-efficient upgrades, decarbonize 75 properties, regenerate Council estates, boost the supply of affordably priced private rented homes and build 405 new council homes across the borough, prevent homelessness, decrease the number of individuals living in temporary housing, enhance the standard of rental accommodation sector, and provide more residents of social housing with access to a faster internet connection.

- Strong and fair economic growth through supporting local residents and businesses to deal with the rising cost of living and continuous development of Sutton town centre and Belmont London Cancer Hub. Supporting local businesses and working to create jobs for residents. Sutton Council has taken actions to provide guidance and assistance to residents and businesses affected by the rising living costs. The council plans to deliver a Careers Hub to aid high-quality careers initiatives, to create a Digital Inclusion Strategy aimed at improving digital access, accessibility, and skills, to promote the Council as a great employer for local people, to develop and implement a restoration strategy for Sutton Town Centre and St Nicholas Centre, improve transport sustainability and maintain borough districts safety.
- Campaign for quality local services.
The councils' plan by 2027 is to provide Sutton residents with high-quality healthcare, campaign for improved public transport and prevent train and bus services reduction and campaign for optimal funding for Sutton. They plan to lobby central government for enhanced/fair funding, work with London Councils and the Local Government Association to make the case for more funding to be devolved to a local level, sustain effective policing resources, demand TFL and the Government for public transport advancements, encourage investment to deliver the Belmont Rail Frequency Improvement Scheme, and lobby Thames Water and the Environment Agency for flood management funding.
- An efficient and well-run council - aiming to invest in developing the council's employees and providing high-quality, accessible services. To deploy funds for development of council assets. The Council should identify opportunities to make services more cost-effective and sustainable, improve Customer Services, work in partnership with contractors and providers, performance manage and review services, and implement the Financial Management Code Action Plan.

Summary

Sutton Council engages with stakeholders via a range of methods, including councillors, local committees, notice boards, hotlines, and social media, to ensure that their opinions are considered and incorporated into services. Together, the London Borough of Sutton and the Metropolitan Police address security concerns and pursue long-term solutions. Through scrutiny committees, forums, friends groups, Youth Parliament, and Customer Services Customer Focus Group, residents can influence service distribution. The council's approach to consultation is founded on four principles: coordination, access, clarity, trust, and adherence to the Equality Act of 2010. They pledge to eliminate discrimination, advance opportunity equality, and cultivate good relations. The Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Steering Group provides advice and assistance to the Corporate Management Team in the development and implementation of equality and diversity strategies, policies, and guidelines. The Sutton Council has devised a five-year plan to address the borough's problems. The Sutton Housing Association is implementing a five-year investment strategy to preserve safe, sustainable, and high-quality Council housing, to prevent homelessness, and to provide timely assistance to homeless or at-risk individuals. The Sutton Council intends to provide quality healthcare, enhance public transportation, and advocate for optimal funding. Sutton Council should identify opportunities to make services more cost-effective and sustainable, enhance Customer Services, collaborate with contractors and service providers, administer and evaluate service performance, and implement the Financial Management Code Action Plan. businesses further by imposing higher parking charges and expanding Controlled Parking Zones discouraging residents to shop locally and failing to attract people from outside the borough to visit.

Environmental issues like street floodings have had residents begging for a solution for a long time, to only be acknowledged and ignored or resolution delayed by the local authorities. Low-lying roads in the borough often get flooded when higher rainfall occurs.

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