



THE CONNECTED SOCIETY

A Policy Toolkit for Local Engagement in the Public Realm



POLICY TOOLKIT

ABOUT LOCALIS

Who we are

We are a leading, independent think tank that was established in 2001. Our work promotes neo-localist ideas through research, events and commentary, covering a range of local and national domestic policy issues.

In particular our work is focused on four areas:

- **Decentralising political economy.** Developing and differentiating regional economies and an accompanying devolution of democratic leadership.
- **Empowering local leadership.** Elevating the role and responsibilities of local leaders in shaping and directing their place.
- **Extending local civil capacity.** The mission of the strategic authority as a convener of civil society; from private to charity sector, household to community.
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We publish research throughout the year, from extensive reports to shorter pamphlets, on a diverse range of policy areas. We run a broad events programme, including roundtable discussions, panel events and an extensive party conference programme. We also run a membership network of local authorities and corporate fellows.

ABOUT LOCALIS POLICY TOOLKITS

Localis Policy Toolkits are streamlined, modular reports designed to give local government practitioners clear and concise overviews of options, best practice and regulatory frameworks of individual issues within broad themes. Policy professionals can expect to find summaries of national and local approaches to major policy issues, with suggestions and recommendations for actions on different spatial scales and at multiple levels of local governance.



CONTENTS

1	Introduction	→
1.1	Purpose of this toolkit	→
1.2	Consultation and engagement: the story so far	→
1.3	The role of the local state	→
2	Policy Toolkit	→
2.1	Understanding	→
2.2	Internalising	→
2.3	Practicing	→
3	Actions and policy options summary	→



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1	Purpose of this toolkit	→
1.2	Consultation and engagement: the story so far	→
1.3	The role of the local state	→

The author G.K. Chesterton, one of Kensington and Chelsea's more notable and original localists (see the Napoleon of Notting Hill) once noted that, "when it comes to the life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude".

When it comes to the everyday functions of local authorities and how we interact with them, and them with us as residents or communities, it is remarkably easy to overlook the importance participation, trust and two-way communication that go into creating strong reciprocal relationships.

As a concept, localism has the potential to deliver real democratic accountability and public good, but only if done in a way that delivers real power to people. To develop deeper connections between the local state and citizens is not necessarily a matter of institutional formality. It is a question of substance and concerns the relations between the functions of a local authority

– such as the services provided – and the citizens they are responsible for.

“As a concept, localism has the potential to deliver real democratic accountability and public good, but only if done in a way that delivers real power to people.”

Neither the local state nor civil society and community should be seen as acting in isolation. Local authorities derive their legitimacy through their interaction with citizens and an organised and active civil society. Furthermore, a capable local authority can use these interactions to assess the needs of citizens that can then go on to inform technical or policy solutions that deliver better and more responsive public services, and create an improved public realm and local environment.

How citizens and communities identify with



their local area is notoriously tricky to grasp. In the immediate policy context, the government's Levelling Up White Paper has used the rhetoric of 'pride in place' – a helpful springboard.

“Engagement itself is achieved when the community is and feels part of the overall governance of that community.”

As a means of improving delivery in a way that respects place-identity, local engagement is an outcome that can arise from consultation processes or other interaction between a council and its community, such as participation and the provision of information. Engagement itself is achieved when the community is and feels part of the overall governance of that community. Councils have an important role in building stronger communities, and engaging communities is a key way of doing so.

The COVID-19 lockdowns served as a stress test without parallel for our social infrastructure and fabric. We truly learned the limits and extent of the central state's ability to command and control from Whitehall and the inner-resilience and capacity of the local and hyperlocal to persevere and intuitively innovate on the ground – in many cases without instructions or funding.

Much like common sense being unfortunately uncommon in practice, lessons learned are

seldom heeded. If there is to be any true value from our experience, to transform the scarring and poison of our pandemic experience into wisdom and medicine it is this. It lies in making copper-bottom sure that the spirit of community we have seen in the crisis, and the new opportunities of technology to make a more connected society, are rigorously and ruthlessly followed up for the sake of improving people's lives everywhere.

For central government, the idea of local economic generation is affixed to the notion of 'pride in place'. Under objective three of the government's Levelling Up the United Kingdom White Paper, there is the goal of restoring “a sense of community, local pride and belonging”. Under this objective, the paper speaks of 'pride in place' consisting of policies to support regeneration, communities, green space and cultural activity. **The Connected Society**, therefore, represents an early attempt to marry an understanding of levelling up theory with the practice of community-led placemaking on the streets, the alfresco dining areas, in the pocket parks and among the diverse communities of Kensington & Chelsea. It is to be hoped that there is much in this policy toolkit that can be learned and adapted to in different places and circumstances.



1.1

This policy toolkit has gathered perspectives on consultation, engagement and participation at the local level, considering a recent push to empower communities after neighbourhood-level organisation took centre stage during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study has also analysed relevant discourse, and highlights key ideas regarding the understanding, internalisation and the better practice of engagement towards a genuinely participatory democracy.

Public engagement is a complex matter that has developed considerably in recent decades. Various national and local governments have sought to wrestle with consultation and engagement to unlock its latent potential in encouraging resident involvement in the local political process. The approach taken to this toolkit has been to explore public engagement through the lens of Kensington & Chelsea's practices. Staff members from across many service departments were queried on the extent and nature of public engagement in their borough. Findings from these interviews were incorporated into the broader research, allowing for several policy options to be uncovered, as well as key themes any local authority ought to be aware of.

PURPOSE OF THIS TOOLKIT

Overall, while public engagement is a challenging practice for local authorities, an examination of Kensington & Chelsea's approach and relating this to wider discourse on the matter demonstrates the immense potential public engagement can have when approached with determination, good management, and a human touch. This toolkit is an attempt to capture this potential and lay out what it takes for a local authority to make their own public engagements more effective.

1.1.1 POLICY OPTIONS SUMMARY

Below is a list of the all the policy options arising from the toolkit.

UNDERSTANDING

- Design consultations to identify areas which residents feel are points of shame for the borough.
- Build an understanding of different types of interaction – reactive, directive and proactive – into council engagement strategy and staff training.
- Ensure that public engagement makes clear to residents participating what stage of policy formulation they are informing, with a particular focus on engagement at the earliest possible stage.
- Regularly review policy ‘redlines’ for engagement with an emphasis on reduction and resident negotiation wherever possible.
- Form cross-departmental working groups for individual regeneration projects that can be accountable for ensuring consultation results relating to the public realm are integrated across the multifaceted action involved in development.

INTERNALISING

- Ensure that engagement events are held at familiar and accessible locations to target communities.
- Build mechanisms into the policy approval process that depend on local consultation being carried out.
- Ensure that all consultations are preceded by a review of previous engagement exercises to check that the question being asked is new to the target audience.
- Dedicate staff time and resources to understanding and minimising ‘consultation fatigue’ by taking a holistic look at the consultation timeline of all policies and ensuring that communities are being spoken to in the most efficient and least repetitive manner.
- Ensure that the results of all consultations are specifically connected to policy outcomes in documents which are internally and externally available.
- Use examples of consultations and how their results are reflected in policy and the built environment as training materials to bring all staff on board with the idea of engagement as necessary to effective placemaking.
- Establish and support cross-departmental working groups to track ongoing engagements and their results.
- Create accountability mechanisms and regular reviews to ensure that trends and themes identified across engagements are monitored and reflected in policy.

PRACTISING

- Build into consultation and engagement strategy clear explanations of what methods are to be used and how each method will effectively target different communities.
- Engage in ‘tactical oversampling’ of hard-to-reach communities to ensure that consultations are genuinely representative.
- Visualise and – where possible – quantify the balance between online and in-person consultations, as part of external communications on wider engagements.
- Continuously develop and expand online engagement tools to maximise the accessibility and clarity of information on where and how residents can influence local government policy and function.
- Provide opportunities beyond issue-by-issue consultation for residents to air frustrations or grievances with local process and policymaking.
- Publish and widely communicate the results of consultations and wider engagement activity and how they have been taken forward in policy.
- Ensure that language used is accessible as possible, avoiding the abstract where possible, and use language familiar to residents.



1.2

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT: THE STORY SO FAR

1.2.1	Public engagement in local policymaking	→
1.2.2	Pride, shame and local identity	→
1.2.3	Regeneration, COVID and the public realm	→

For several decades, there has been an increasing awareness of community engagement as a policy function, and a series of policy initiatives that have, for better or for worse, aimed to encourage local authorities to engage in the practice. Over the years, local authorities have taken it upon themselves and introduced strategy, policy and practice aimed at better engaging residents on local issues and services. Public organisations across the political spectrum are waking up to the idea that there is a great deal more they can do in partnership with residents and communities. Kensington & Chelsea is looking to make this idea their *modus operandi*. Working to understand, internalise and practice engagement towards genuine participation is crucial in making the most of such an agenda.

Soliciting resident participation in policies which impact the local environment is, in essence, consulting experts on place. Residents have lived experiences and an intimate understanding of local conditions. If enabled and given the

wherewithal, citizens can become informal local policymakers, deciding on, and taking control of their own lives in relation to the public domain – putting their unique local expertise to great use.

1.2.1 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL POLICYMAKING

In recent decades, a push towards more public engagement in policymaking has developed across English local government. Contributing factors to this push include:

- a general disillusionment towards the local political process and subsequent awareness of a democratic deficit at the level of place,
- a perceived gap between representative and deliberative democracy in their potential to improve places and empower residents, and
- the emergence of new forms of communication and media which are inherently conducive to an increased awareness of the local political process and

its potential for participation.

In attempts to capture these trends through policy, successive central governments have produced policy and guidance aimed at encouraging more public engagement, typically through the lens of ‘community empowerment’.

Whilst there has been a lot of good to come out of these government agendas, they are often criticised for talking a lot about empowerment, without any genuine commitment to ceding it by relinquishing control over how development and regeneration occurs at the local level. The New Labour and subsequent coalition and Conservative governments had been accused of hyper-fixating on centrally prescribed measures and outcomes, with genuine community power rarely manifesting. However, due to increasingly difficult local challenges and the reduced capacity of English local government, hierarchical decision-making structures are becoming much less strict and there is a discernible shift towards a broader, more networked model of local stakeholders – seeing this mode of participation strengthen and proliferate.

Proactive engagement moving towards genuine participation for communities should be seen as an investment – both economically and socially – that can bring great returns if managed well. Furthermore, this investment need not be costly; strong organisational will and well-researched training are some of the most influential success factors for community engagement initiatives, neither of which necessitate costly intervention. In addition to these success factors, bureaucratic support across a public sector organisation is a crucial success factor for community engagement initiatives¹². From ‘top-to-bottom’, an organisation must believe in community engagement and the viability of it as a method of governance.

A key aspect of proactive engagement is recognising whether outright consultation is necessary, and whether channels of communication and other, ‘softer’ means of engagement may be more effective and less demanding for residents who are less inclined to participate in consultations outright. Developing

an understanding of how residents and their respective groups or neighbourhoods like to be engaged with and what issues concern them specifically, thus tailoring the approach to their preference, is the type of proactivity a local authority should be striving toward.

1.2.2 PRIDE, SHAME AND LOCAL IDENTITY

Although much has changed since the 2019 general election, local authorities are still operating in the context of the government’s mandate to deliver levelling up in a way which has been linked inextricably with the nebulous concept of ‘pride of place’. Therefore, it is important for an authority to grapple with place pride and how emotions and identity relate to policy in their local area.

On the one hand, this allows for an effective basis on which to pursue policymaking. On the other, it helps a local authority secure better buy-in to the idea that all local issues relate to place and its development, and there is in consequence, a duty for an authority to use their power to inspire a more positive connection to place and its constituent parts.

Place pride is a term well-deserving of scrutiny wherever it is leveraged, particularly when affecting matters of politics and identity. As many have noted, the concept is not the most immediately functional basis on which to pursue local policy and has a patchy history in this regard. There is without a doubt pride to be felt in communities and neighbourhoods, boroughs, and places – the community solidarity seen over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic was also demonstrative of how place pride can lead to action. However, in terms of a functional basis on which to pursue engagements and subsequent policy from within a local authority, it is far too obtuse and interpretative of a concept to be pursued as an outcome in of itself.

Rather, when considering how to bridge notions of local identity and community pride, with more concrete matters of redevelopment and regeneration, the absence of shame is a more useful way to invoke place pride. When asking

1 Ryan (2021) – Why citizen participation succeeds or fails: A comparative analysis of participatory budgeting
2 Blijleven (2022) – Expert, bureaucrat, facilitator: The role of expert public servants in interactive governance

residents what they feel most proud of locally, the answer is likely to be abstract or vague, or so contextual it becomes too difficult to action on. However, embracing the emotional nature of local identity and asking residents what they are most ashamed of locally, they are likely to point towards specific issues or physical manifestations of shame. This is not only a much more functional basis on which to pursue policy, it also produces outcomes that, if achieved, will inspire place pride. This is because the absence of shame begets pride; the two emotions are dialectical.

1.2.3 REGENERATION, COVID AND THE PUBLIC REALM

Historical and structural factors have driven decline in local centres, with high streets typically worst affected. The current socio-economic context at local, national and global scales, is one of increasing costs, supply chain difficulties and labour shortages in key industries. Regarding levelling up, regeneration of these local centres seems to put at the forefront of pursuing pride in place through efforts to level up. The Levelling Up White Paper further outlined this goal, to be facilitated by local community initiatives and regeneration strategy.

It is important to remember that local centres and high streets were under considerable pressure long before the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. A perfect storm has been created by an age of austerity, the continued preference for online shopping, paralysing rents, and businesses rates; all factors which have driven the evolution of high streets. All high streets have been affected by far-reaching financial constraints, with both big chains and independent retails affected. Thus, the pandemic merely accelerated what had already been happening for the last decade. Stores are being closed across the board with no forecast of a return to 'normality'.

Identifying and targeting where shame is most sharply felt locally and where aforementioned decline is most tangible, is where engagement becomes most prudent. If undertaken well, this forms a strong basis from which to pursue regeneration and reverse decline on one hand, whilst strengthening the emotional connection people have with place on the other. Tangible prospects for the success of such an agenda

include maximising the value of local centres, increasing housing delivery, boosting local economic growth and driving towards greater sustainability – not to mention a distinctly humane approach to recovery.

Perhaps most relevant to inspiring pride in place though is that regeneration speaks to improving the emotional reactions of people to the place where they live. Recent research at LSE on social cohesion during the pandemic compliments this notion, wherein which those living in local areas who had previously invested in social cohesion via the Integration Area programme in 2020 were more likely to trust their local authority and other people in general.



1.3

THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL STATE

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|--------------|--|---|
| 1.3.1 | Local government powers and responsibilities | → |
| 1.3.2 | Resources and capacity | → |

Despite the ongoing constraints on local government finances, there are still several options available for authorities looking to maximise the potential of public engagements. Furthermore, there are instances where local authorities are statutorily required to consult residents on local matters. Likewise, there are legal frameworks available for residents and communities to access bottom-up power through participation, albeit limited in scope. Understanding how these powers are used and interact with one another locally is key for authorities looking to improve their approach to public engagements.

1.3.1 LOCAL GOVERNMENT POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In some instances, particularly regarding matters of planning or redevelopment, local authorities have a statutory requirement to consult residents. Failure to evidence such statutory consultations could leave an authority liable for judicial review and subsequent intervention. Many types of development require statutory consultees in the form of certain national authorities, trusts and government departments. In many instances concerning regeneration, these statutory consultees include some version of resident representation – whether it be a parish council, neighbourhood forum or other representative groups.

On the other hand, non-statutory engagements are not required by law and are used at the discretion of local authority operators. It is the proliferation of non-statutory engagements that has increased significantly across the sector – due to an increased awareness of the usefulness of engaging the public outside of rigid, often prescribed, statutory requirements. Non-statutory engagements can play a distinct and important role in agenda setting and policy formation, as well as strengthening the basis on which further opportunities for participation can be built upon later in the policy cycle. These engagements are often used throughout the policy cycle to inspire a more deliberative, relational approach to placemaking and, although they are optional by law, they are strongly recommended for consideration wherever there is room for change and local nuance in the policy or strategy being developed.

Having the public play a role in local governance is widely considered to contribute to the quality of and support for policy. Furthermore, encouraging participation will sharpen collaborative working, allowing for needs, themes, outcomes and measures to be informed by a shared participatory process. Striking a good, amenable balance of representative functions and direct contact is a tricky process – one that ought to involve key local stakeholders themselves.

In terms of upward community power, the most significant outside of engagement activity is the neighbourhood plan. Neighbourhood plans are a mechanism through which a broad consensus can be made of differing resident views on local matters of planning and development. Many examples have demonstrated the success of neighbourhood plans in hitting housing targets in a way that is satisfactory, even preferable to the relevant communities. However, the expertise and time needed to put such documents together is often cited as a major impediment to their implementation in many areas. Beyond this, opportunities for resident and community power are more locally-specific. Whether taking the form of citizen panels, focus groups, forums, or polling, this is dependent on the extent to which a local authority is consciously extending their public engagement function.

1.3.2 RESOURCES AND CAPACITY

The perceived costs of public engagement are high for councils already anxious about funding. Funding cuts experienced by local authorities over the last decade have left them in a position of only being able to focus on what is immediately pressing when it comes to policymaking. In turn, this has impacted negatively on the capacity of local authorities to engage in bottom-up resident and community engagement on large scale regeneration projects. These financial limitations often leave local authorities in the position of having to prioritise securing capital investments through expedited land developments over a more place-based, albeit less lucrative approach to policymaking. This is driven, in part, from fear of not wanting to waste funds.

This funding gap has also led to poor democratic innovation, where local authorities either go cheap on shortsighted community initiatives of poor quality, or lack the will to engage beyond statutory requirements at all. The gap in funding also sours public management attitudes towards community engagement and participation, as they become more perceptive and, in some cases perhaps, more cynical about what is worth spending limited

resources on. There is a reluctance to use public engagement and other relevant levers, for fear of driving away investment or not securing funds quickly enough.

Nonetheless, there is an idealistic view of engagement that can often stand in the way of progress on the practice and working towards participatory democracy. Whilst factors such as an active civil society, full support from politicians and public managers, funding and resources, and a high human development index can help in certain contexts, organisational will and proliferation of training on best practice rise above all else as the most influential success factors for community engagement initiatives³⁴⁵. Resources and funding, whilst undeniably useful and conducive to innovation, are less influential in the success of community engagement initiatives. Best practice examples in community engagement are often of local authorities who have found ways to overcome a lack of financial support, rather than being facilitated by good funding.

Through the process, civil society is strengthened and becomes more competent at sharing responsibilities with the local authority, taking pressure off the organisation. Effective, well-managed community engagement, particularly on matters of community infrastructure, can see success beget success. Across London and beyond, there are countless examples of strong community infrastructure having its roots in community organisation and subsequent influence over the local political process.

Similarly, a strong civil society is often cited as integral to the success of community engagement initiatives. However, in an analysis of cases of this sort across the globe, author Matt Ryan⁶ found that civil society is often built and strengthened through the process of engagement. Indeed, local movements will often stay focused and involved in community issues beyond the community engagement initiatives of local government, suggesting that civil society has strengthened as an outcome of initial engagement initiatives.

3 Wilkinson et al. (2019) – In participatory budgeting we trust? Fairness, tactics and (in)accessibility in participatory governance

4 Ryan et al. (2018) – How best to open up local democracy? A randomised experiment to encourage contested elections and greater representativeness in English parish councils

5 Blijleven (2022) – Expert, bureaucrat, facilitator: The role of expert public servants in interactive governance

6 Ryan (2021) – Why citizen participation succeeds or fails: A comparative analysis of participatory budgeting

“This section presents a ‘policy toolkit’, giving brief overviews and policy options for local government activity on key areas of public engagement in relation to regeneration.”

CHAPTER 2

POLICY TOOLKIT

2.1	Understanding	→
2.2	Internalising	→
2.3	Practising	→

Prior to and during the pandemic, many local authorities have sought to maintain and improve their public engagement, whether this is in the form of codifying principles through organisational charters, or introducing internal formalised mechanisms aimed at maximising the value of public engagements to the process of policymaking. Kensington & Chelsea have themselves renewed a commitment to a more wholesale, place-based approach to engagement in the borough. Their experiences over the past five years are demonstrative of a general trend towards better-quality consultations, more participation in the local political process from residents, and stronger commitments from local authorities to deliver on the placemaking potential of public engagement. To this end, key overarching themes, examples of best practice

at the council and an analysis of relevant policymaking reveals a useful discourse.

This section presents a ‘policy toolkit’, giving brief overviews and policy options for local government activity on key areas of public engagement in relation to regeneration and working towards a genuinely participatory democracy, illustrated with specific examples from the experiences of Kensington & Chelsea. The idea is to give a quick and accessible impression of how local government might act on understanding, internalising and practising public engagement, ultimately helping stimulate and guide thinking on how a local authority ought to develop their own approach to public engagement and policymaking.

METHODOLOGY

This toolkit is a synthesis of the following research methodologies:

- A review of relevant policy, strategy and internal mechanisms at Kensington & Chelsea and elsewhere.
- An extensive series of interviews and a roundtable discussion with both internal staff members at Kensington & Chelsea and external experts on matters of consultation, engagement and public participation.
- An analysis of relevant discourse concerning consultation, engagement and public participation at the local level and the relationship between engagement, local identity, policymaking, and the public realm.



2.1

UNDERSTANDING

2.1.1	Pride and identity	→
2.1.2	Types of participation	→
2.1.3	The public realm	→
2.1.4	Actions and policy options	→

When approaching consultation and engagement at the local level, with honest intentions of transcending tokenism and moving towards genuine participation, it is important to understand the nature of public engagement. The section looks to break down this understanding into matters of pride & local identity, types and typologies of participation, and the relationship between engagement and the public realm.

2.1.1 PRIDE AND IDENTITY

Overview

The Levelling Up White Paper, codified in part by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, has introduced the concept of 'pride in place' to national legislation on local regeneration. Under objective three of the white paper, there is the goal of restoring "a sense of community, local pride and belonging". Under this objective, the paper speaks of pride in place consisting of policies to support regeneration, communities,

green space and cultural activity. This is the framework within which local government must now function when approaching levelling up at the local level, particularly when invoking a sense of pride or local identity.

Whilst 'pride in place' may be the latest version, pride has become a more widely disseminated, yet continually vague, public policy discourse on which councils have operated on since the early 1990s – particularly in urban areas where this may be traced back to the Heseltine initiatives of the early to mid-1980s. Furthermore, the Localism Act 2011, whilst not explicitly mentioning the term, was implicit of restoring a sense of pride in local places by moving towards facilitating more agency for residents and community groups – again, to mixed results.

Navigating the emotional nature of local identity is tricky for organisations so used to being caught up in bureaucracy and internal procedures. However, it is being increasingly demanded

that public managers and officers have integrity, sound judgement and emotional intelligence – values that reflect well on a place and its residents⁷. These need not be values that supplant existing staff and can instead be embedded as part of an organisation-wide training programme that communicates best practice across departments and hierarchies.

Local context

At its most functional, place pride can be a useful tool for local government, most effectively to attract investment and convince residents on the benefits of regeneration. Despite the prevalence of pride in local rhetoric and policymaking, its emotional substance and relationship with shame is typically undermined and undervalued, both in policy and political discourse. Therefore, it is important to draw attention to this underappreciated emotional nature of pride, and how restoring a sense of civic pride, or more contemporaneously 'pride in place', is ultimately a negotiation of pride and shame – they are dialectical at the local level, co-dependent on each other for visibility⁸.

Although pride and shame are related in this manner, shame and its associated emotions are arguably a more effective basis on which to pursue engagement and subsequent policy. In the implicit negotiation of pride and shame that local authorities grapple with, there is rarely an explicit engagement with how these and other emotions factor into the local policymaking process. According to authors such as Jones⁹ and McGuirk¹⁰, this can cause an emotional deficit at the local level, proving problematic when it is assumed that structures of power, identity and inequality are simply the result of intangible processes, rather than reflecting human anxieties, needs, and goals in life. However, by accepting the presence of shame, identifying it through engagement, internalising a willingness to address where shame is felt most, and strategising to minimise its presence locally, local authorities will find that pride in place will

become more visible, given the dialectical nature of the relationship between the two concepts.

Engaging residents and communities on what makes them feel most ashamed about their local area – particularly in relation to the impacts of COVID-19 and subsequent crises – allows for 'epicentres of shame' to be identified and allows for emotional aspects of local identity to be teased out without undermining the relevant baggage of social injustice, inequality, or other causes for negative perceptions of place. Functioning narrowly on pride alone leaves too much room for interpretation and, if not the product of a shared local vision, rather than the basis on which one is initially built, is inherently suspect to swathes of a local population, given the presence of differing experiences of place and reservations about how proud or ashamed (or other relevant emotions) of their local area and its constituent parts they really are.

It is difficult to inspire and strengthen a positive emotional connection to place, without accepting and identifying where and why shame and other negativity is most acutely felt. To use a crude example, if a resident is ashamed the high street is failing, a local authority working to see that high street succeed is likely to catch the attention of that resident, inspire an emotional connection to the process and, ultimately, develop a stronger sense of place pride. This is not to suggest that residents' answers will always be so simple – it may be the case that residents still feel ashamed of more abstract and tricky matters such as a general lack of opportunity or loss of culture. Despite the potential for trickier answers, the following, nonetheless, still presents a more operative vision of 'place pride' in local policymaking. Put simply:

1. identify shame through engagement;
2. analyse and internalise findings;
3. develop policy and strategy working towards the absence of shame;
4. communicate the process and deliver results.

7 Migchelbrink & Van de Walle (2022) – A systematic review of the literature on determinants of public managers' attitudes toward public participation

8 Collins (2016) – Urban civic pride and the new localism

9 Jones (2013) – Negotiating cohesion, inequality and change: Uncomfortable positions in local government

10 McGuirk (2012) – Geographies of urban politics: pathways, intersections, interventions

2.1.2 TYPES OF PARTICIPATION

Overview

Beyond distinct types of interaction, grouping interactions between a local authority, communities, and other stakeholders becomes more complex and diffuse. It is therefore better suited to adopt a macro-level view and consider interactions in terms of three typologies.

- **Reactive:** engaging in response to complaints or external pressures.
- **Directive:** engaging residents with pre- or semi-determined outcomes.
- **Proactive:** strategic engagements to pre-empt local issues and develop better policy.

Reactive interactions between a council and residents are an unavoidable aspect of day-to-day council functionality, particularly for those working in delivering frontline services or responsible for dealing with complaints. Despite their inevitability, these reactive interactions are still worthy of conscious consideration. There are instances where **directive interactions** become necessary, after all in their most basic form directive interactions can be as modest as just providing information. The key then is to communicate this necessity to develop public understanding and keep people engaged.

Proactive interactions, or ongoing strategic engagements, are typically non-statutory and are what local authorities should aim to maximise when agenda setting, developing policy, making decisions, and delivering services.

In applying these typologies, it is not a matter of which typology exists where, they are not mutually exclusive either. Rather, it is best to take note of the role each typology plays locally, how it can be explored, and what improvements can be made.

Local context

When beginning a process of engagement, a local authority should be conscious of what typologies are going to be most suitable to the policy process at hand – and how they can be used strategically to maximise results. At the very least, the minimum standard should avoid a fourth hidden typology; pseudo engagement – where a local authority depicts themselves to be taking consultation, engagement and participation

seriously, but fail to follow through with results in policy or practice.

Reactive interactions are inevitable, and it is the nature of how they are responded to that is key to optimising all interactions to be more rewarding. When reacting to a complaint or request made by a resident or community, it is important to be aware of how the communication can be as conducive to building trust and encouraging participation as is appropriate. Reactive interactions can become proactive communication if they are encouraging, informative and open-ended. Moreover, ensuring that progress and results on complaints and requests are fed back to respective residents is key to the visibility of positive council function.

Regarding directive interactions, the parameters of pre- or semi-determined outcomes should be open to public scrutiny and debate, particularly matters of regeneration and the built environment that directly affect certain residents. This can be challenging; at Kensington & Chelsea this challenge has manifested in the form of *redlines*. When engaging in directive interactions, staff members raised in interviews that the existence of non-negotiable redlines and having to pass them down to communities was difficult. Redlines stunt the ability of staff to put the council and residents on an equal footing, ultimately restricting the possibilities of engagement practice and, in its most reactive form, leaving the council wide open to criticisms of tokenism.

Furthermore, the existence of redlines implies a distinct end to the engagement process that is out of the hands of those being engaged. This is not conducive to developing consultation and engagement towards a genuinely participatory democracy, rather it further embeds sentiments of local government continuing to work paternalistically – irrespective of input on the side of residents. Even in the most rigid of scenarios, directive interactions need not be aggravating. Like reactive interactions, they can be tweaked to be more informative and congenial, to encourage a process that is as open and transparent as possible.

Despite the inevitable co-habitation of all three typologies, **embedded proactivity** is the ideal to be striven towards – as this is most conducive

to having citizens and communities become active participants in local politics. Proactive consultation and engagement, pointed towards genuine participation, should not be a matter of majority rule, rather becoming adept at weighing up views and internalising learnings from them – eventually leading to action. To achieve this, a local authority should look to engage residents as early as possible in the policymaking process, as well as carving out roles and responsibilities for an engaged public in the decision-making and functionality of the council.

Engaging residents early allows for the political vision of the council to be informed by the experiences of those who live in a local area. As experts of place, residents will inevitably have a useful ‘inside scoop’ on local issues and matters of development. Incorporating this into the council’s broader vision of place will allow for said local issues and matters of development to be approached proactively, rather than being taken by surprise and having to react on-the-fly at a more critical stage.

2.1.3 THE PUBLIC REALM

Overview

There are several ways in which residents interrelate as service users, voters, members of the community, consumers, etc. Most of this interrelating social activity either takes place in a resident’s neighbourhood or local centre. Local centres are hubs of social activity, they are where most of the borough’s benefits and issues are most acutely felt and communicated. Local centres are hubs of activity, capital, opportunity, and sociality. They and their constituent amenities are key points of reference in both the individual and collective local imaginary of place, how it serves, and how it makes them feel.

There is an immediacy of local centres that should be understood, utilised for engagement effectively, and emboldened further. Furthermore, they and the amenities that constitute them are epicentres of pride or shame, as are services in the local area.

Historical and structural factors have driven decline in local centres, with high streets typically worst affected. The current socio-economic context at local, national and global scales, is one of

increasing costs, supply chain difficulties and labour shortages in key industries. Regarding levelling up efforts, regeneration of these local centres seems to put at the forefront of pursuing so-called ‘pride in place’. The White Paper codifies this pursuit, to be carried out through a combination of culture and heritage, facilitated by local communities and regeneration strategy.

It is important to understand what ‘placemaking’ means to a particular local authority. Ultimately, placemaking is a matter of local government organisation and function, as for residents, places are already ‘made’, and it is the perceived effects of relative progress or decline that concerns residents. Perceptions of this relative progress or decline is what the local government conception of placemaking should seek to capture and act upon. The more residents are brought into the fold of this internal placemaking process, the more representative of their concerns and desires the process and its results will become.

Local context

Comprehensive improvements to the public realm and local centres form a critical part of placemaking policy in the current context. The key outcomes should be an emboldening of local identity and place pride, directed by engagement activity that is not afraid to strike an emotional connection between a local authority and residents on more complex, difficult matters of shame and embarrassment.

A local centre may be able to be developed in such a way that it is more attractive to businesses, investors, and visitors but unless its development is informed by deliberated public engagements with an emotional aspect, regeneration risks undermining residents, stoking discontent, or, at worst, see them displaced. Although governing a local area and knowing when to consult is dependent on a large set of variables and incredibly contextualised, incorporating these principles into regeneration strategies and being prepared to engage residents and communities on an emotional basis – particularly on matters of shame and negativity – constructs a sense of shared identity, vision and working towards betterment, of which ‘pride in place’ is a by-product.

Investing time and energy into this emotional

connection and social cohesion more broadly, allows for an understanding of the interrelationship of demographics, history, relations, economy, and so on, to proliferate and escape the trappings of 'pride in place' that can be self-serving.

Internalising this mindset and having it reflect on local centres and the built environment has no one-size-fits-all model for councils. But notable

success factors include:

- Breaking down departmental silo-thinking.
- Cross-sector partnerships.
- Promoting trust through engagements.
- Having staff with distinct engagement roles and responsibility, or better yet, a whole team that networks across departments.

Engagement in practice: assessing local priorities for a 'pocket park'

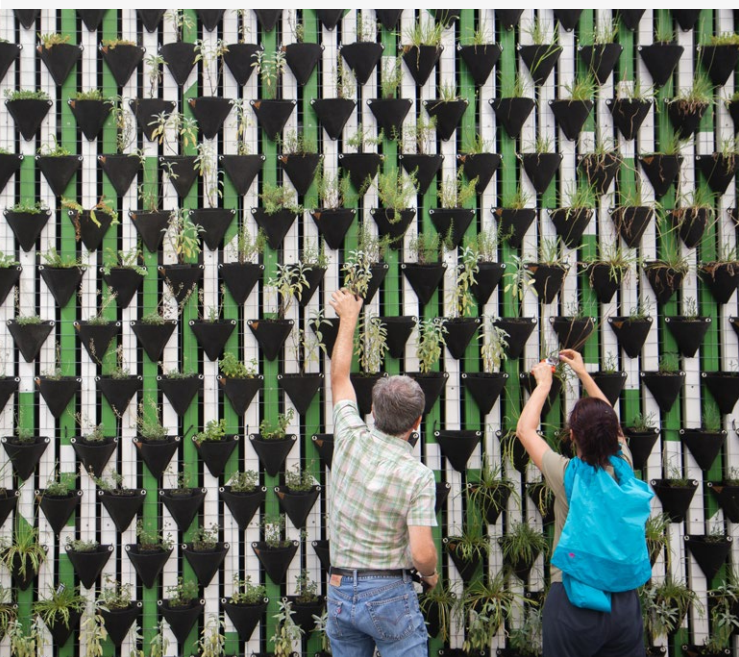
Pocket parks are small, functional greenspaces accessible to the public. In Kensington & Chelsea, a consultation was run on refurbishing and making improvements to Powis Square Gardens – one of three pocket parks in the borough's Parks Strategy. In doing so, an online survey was designed, developed and published, leaflets advertising the consultation process were dropped to local streets, and staff were present in Powis Square to promote the process further.

In designing the survey, the council was cautious to move away from simple quantitative metrics, and asked a mixed-methods array of questions, the results of which were analysed in a manner most appropriate to the nature of each question. Beyond a laid out proforma, the council also invited additional comments and suggestions – which were themselves analysed thematically.

2.1.4 ACTIONS AND POLICY OPTIONS

Some possible actions to enhance understanding of the public engagement process, local conceptions of pride and identity and the role of consultation in governing the public realm are listed below.

- Design consultations to identify areas which residents feel are points of shame for the borough.
- Build an understanding of different types of interaction – reactive, directive and proactive – into council engagement strategy and staff training.
- Ensure that public engagement makes clear to residents participating what stage of policy formulation they are informing, with a particular focus on engagement at the earliest possible stage.
- Regularly review policy 'redlines' for engagement with an emphasis on reduction and resident negotiation wherever possible.
- Form cross-departmental working groups for individual regeneration projects that can be accountable for ensuring consultation results relating to the public realm are integrated across the multifaceted action involved in development.



2.2

INTERNALISING

2.2.1	Commitments	→
2.2.2	Ongoing engagements	→
2.2.3	Absorbing consultation findings	→
2.2.4	Priority setting	→
2.2.5	Actions and policy options	→

Moving forward from understanding public engagement and its potential, there is a need for local authorities to internalise public engagement and its teachings to ensure that the views and insights gained from engagements are well-reflected in a council's priorities and day-to-day functionality. To this end, there is a need to be conscious of ongoing engagements and how they can become more relational. Moreover, how data and findings from consultations and ongoing engagements are analysed and absorbed is equally as important. Finally, the product of this ongoing internalisation process will be the setting of council priorities, ideally now informed by a comprehensive analysis of a local authority's engagement activity – staying true to a more relational mindset by remaining open to further refinement and scrutiny.

2.2.1 COMMITMENTS

Overview

Making commitments and having them publicly available is arguably the first step required for any engagement strategy. Whether it is the design of the process, matters of scope, purpose, outputs or outcomes, commitments are the foundation on which trust with residents is built – a scaffolding that can be pointed towards when intentions will inevitably be questioned.

Commitments not only inform the process as it unfolds, but they set the intentions of a local authority; against which residents can judge the viability of ongoing engagement strategies. Having a vision of genuinely participatory democracy, with codified commitments, is important, as it sets into action a process of understanding, internalising, and practising certain roles and responsibilities, as well as a

general mindfulness of how the council impacts residents in its day-to-day activity.

A commonly-practised approach regarding commitments is to have a centralised document. Having commitments codified and public facing is helpful in convincing all staff of the validity of the engagement approach, as well as visible commitments to be pointed towards in convincing residents of the validity of engagement processes. Beyond more logistical matters, commitments should be in a similar vein to the following;

- a relational approach to governance,
- strong networking and communication systems,
- dedication to building capacity,
- a willingness to cede some power and control, and
- an organisational culture that is engaged and facilitative, etc.

Local context

Kensington & Chelsea has codified its engagement commitments with its Charter of Public Participation, a centralising document that sets out what the council should be adhering to and considering when making decisions. The charter is public and externally facing, so to be held accountable when not they are not followed through with by the council. It has been quoted as a 'helpful framework' that was the product of cross-departmental and external local stakeholder involvement.

Regarding the specifics of some commitments, staff at Kensington & Chelsea, particularly those with extensive engagement responsibilities, have maintained a commitment to treating residents as experts of place, and as such, capable of influencing decision-making.

The language of consultation and engagement is one that can become convoluted in the local context, terms often carry significant baggage leaving them wide open to interpretation if not used cautiously. Staff at Kensington & Chelsea have admitted to being guilty of this – although significant progress is being made.

It is not so much that there is a set way of using language around local consultation and engagement, rather that local authorities should

be aware that the language they use will be interpreted differently depending on local context – such as the nature of the issue at hand, or where an engagement is being held.

This supplements another general commitment found across the council to run engagements where community and social activity is already well-established, such as at community events or in local centres. This was in reaction to a recognition from the council that the organisation and its constituent staff members were, for the most part, far removed from the lived experiences of the residents in the place they governed. This had entrenched a dissonance and mistrust between the council and residents, particularly in the north of the borough.

In terms of how these commitments have manifested as formalised mechanisms at Kensington & Chelsea, each strategy that has involved resident engagement will have an accompanying summary of how consultation and engagement affected the decisions made. This summary will be passed upward to the leadership to be scrutinised in accordance with certain checks and balances.

This is referred to internally as the 'consultation support gateway', a group of senior level members of staff at the council with significant responsibility for consultation and engagement. If a department wishes to consult residents, they will fill out a form explaining what their intentions are, how they intend to pursue them etc. This form will be scrutinised by the community support gateway with feedback on how to improve the quality of engagement and ensured that it is sustainably well-managed.

Beyond this, every report or policy document that gets signed off by leadership at Kensington & Chelsea must now have an evidenced resident engagement element to pass. Therefore, officers must provide evidence of their engagements and should expect to have this scrutinised. If there is no evidence of consulting or engaging with service users or residents of the borough, then it will fail to pass. This ensures that, for all want and rhetoric, communities cannot be taken out of the equation, as it will become wide open to challenge by the council's formal mechanisms. Even key decision reports, formal signing offs of

individual key decisions by council departments, are often subject to this same level of leadership scrutiny.

2.2.2 ONGOING ENGAGEMENTS

Overview

Whilst the turn to a more relational mindset when approaching local government has developed gradually over the last two decades, it intensified over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, where relationships between councils, the public, and other local stakeholders were strengthened. The value of these strengthened relationships was quickly demonstrated, and the increased involvement of residents and communities proved crucial to the resilience and wellbeing of places.

Ongoing consultation and engagements must be relationally minded, to maximise potential and deliver consistent results. Being mindful of and managing relationships is key for a local authority looking to internalise the views of residents. How the audience, goals, mindset, resources, and social context are going to influence the relationship between the local authority and its residents are necessary considerations for local authorities looking to facilitate dialogue, collaboration and always be moving towards more genuine participation.

Ensuring that ongoing engagements are relational in scope, with open-ended, strategic channels of communication, allows for a shared vision of placemaking to be negotiated and developed – whether in relation to specific issues or the broader local area. Resident participation in these processes should not be confined to specific instances of consultation, instead facilitating room resident participation throughout – particularly in matters of refinement, design and delivery.

The relationship between a local authority and its residents is an incredibly complex matter to navigate, being pushed and pulled by an extensive array of contextual factors. The goals of the council, resources, skills, as well as the social and political environment are all key factors in this regard. Ultimately, the foundation of this relationship is an interdependence between

the council and its residents – one that creates consequences for both sides.¹¹

A particularly tricky aspect of internalising engagements is developing a more positive perception of engagement and participation amongst public managers and leadership. Ensuring that officers and organisational leadership trust and buy into engagement processes to move away from tokenism towards more genuine participation. More traditional methods, such as surveys, are often quoted as being somewhat archaic in nature. However, developing a refreshed model of engagement working towards genuine participation need not displace these more traditional methods, on the contrary. These methods are critically important to gather a breadth of views that a wider population of residents can contribute towards and may not be so inclined, or indeed have the time, to give in person.

Local context

Despite significant progress made at Kensington & Chelsea, it has been raised by staff members that there is a reluctance to relinquish control and decision-making powers for the sake of a more genuinely participatory model of local governance. This is a well-recognised barrier to successful consultation and engagement in the relevant discourse.

This barrier makes it difficult to meaningfully experiment with co-production and co-decision-making, complicating efforts to get on a relatable footing with communities and inspire feelings of genuine autonomy. Persuading internal stakeholders, particularly those with key decision-making powers, of the validity of public engagement is a well-documented uphill struggle for local authorities looking to change their approach. Power is a complex internal issue that manifests differently according to several contextual factors.

Nonetheless, Kensington & Chelsea has instituted a communities team that sits above and works with all other departments at the council. The team has a handle on all consultation and engagement activity happening across the local authority, advising

11 Hung (2005) – Exploring types of organization-public relationships and their implications for relationship management in public relations

on better practice and analysis of results. Where a service needs support to reach out to residents and communities, to engage them on key council matters; the communities team will be on hand to help. The team also has a responsibility for keeping track of consultations and their results, ensuring that learnings are internalised and that departments are not treading on already trodden ground when engaging residents.

Alongside their support role, the communities team is dedicated to improving consultation and engagement standards, skills and practice across the council. They oversee the council's internal consultation and insight portal; an internal online space that maps engagement activity happening across the borough and provides a dynamic environment that proliferates information and learnings across council departments.

A typical isolated process of engagement at Kensington & Chelsea would begin with a look at previous engagements to establish if there are pre-existing needs in the area that have already been identified by engagements. This process is both internal, in the sense of request support from within the council, and external, in the sense of advertising relevant opportunities and providing details to residents and local stakeholders.

This then leads to key questions of what is missing and thus whether further engagement ought to be pursued. Then a selection of the population will be spoken to in an early engagement phase, which, at Kensington & Chelsea, tends to be informal and targeted towards key stakeholders – who are then asked to help spread awareness of the new engagement to get a larger, more representative sample of people engaged going forward. Once this sample has reached an appropriate size and make-up, several avenues for engagement are set up to gather resident's views on the subject matter in question.

For in-person instances, this can become challenging – especially when views are being shared sporadically and at pace. For engagement activity that is online or ongoing by nature, there is an additional responsibility in the council to monitor responses and assess whether engagement is as strong and representative as possible.

As part of this, an engagement officer from Kensington & Chelsea will be on hand at each

engagement event to take notes and produce a summary of the engagement activity as it happens. Prior to each engagement ending, this summary will tend to be presented back to the room, to ensure that residents are happy with what the council is taking away from the time spent engaging.

In some instances, a council department may itself be part of the process of linking engagement to outcomes. Take transport for example. Council leadership or the officer class may hear from a community consultation that there is a problem distinctly related to transport. The department may be passed on the issue, find the solution, deliver it and report back. These instances are demonstrative of the need to ensure that internal communications are not restricted departmentally and that findings from consultations are able to be communicated effectively to ensure that there are no internal missing links that could impede or slow down the process.

On the side of residents, it is a challenge to manage expectations and ensuring a strong enough level of engagement to be ongoing, effective and representative. Without careful management and the strengthening of relations between the council and its residents, there tends to be a very short time cycle whereby residents are fully engaged. Staff at Kensington & Chelsea have echoed this sentiment, reporting that they still struggle with sustaining engagement over longer periods whilst avoiding 'engagement fatigue'.

2.2.3 ABSORBING CONSULTATION FINDINGS

Overview

Inevitably, consultations and broader engagement programmes are going to produce a wide range of views of contrasting viewpoints and divergent interests. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse findings before they can be absorbed and internalised to produce results.

For some aspects of engagement, findings are easily quantifiable, such as with surveys or through some online tools. This makes the process of analysis a reasonably manageable process with commonalities and numeric findings able to be pulled out. However, with more qualitative aspects of engagement, the process becomes much more people-driven – and therefore requires more staff

on hand to gather, analyse and interpret findings. With qualitative data, more considered attention should be paid to the nature of responses, whether residents are satisfied or dissatisfied, in agreement or disagreement, and what patterns are revealed in relation to the characteristics of residents – whether age, ethnicity, class, etc.

Analysing and interpreting the data produced by consultations for the sake of priority-setting and changing council practice going forward requires care and varying levels of expertise. It is important that a local authority is confident in the ability and access to skills to be able to do this and meet public expectations of results.

The identification of trends and patterns of response is important to this process. This is not necessarily a matter of what responses are most populous, but rather what is most distinct and significant to residents. There is then a necessary process of comparison – comparing results with prior engagements as well as ongoing broader engagement mechanisms, as well as how these results reflect on the views of other key local stakeholders – such as anchor institutions and other businesses. Finally, results should be compared with national trends, and whether the most distinct issues raised have been tackled elsewhere effectively and, if so, taking note of these instances for later reference.

This process ultimately results in a set of clear intentions and outcomes, ideally as a part of a summary of engagement findings. Communicating these and proliferating findings across a local authority builds internal trust and encourages staff at all levels to understand the renewed goals of the council in light of ongoing engagements.

Local context

At Kensington & Chelsea, results from various avenues of engagement are analysed and a document in accordance with these findings will be drafted. Before making this draft public and open to wider feedback, the council will go back to the previous sample of residents to present how their engagement has been interpreted internally, clarify specifics, and ultimately work to have participants feel as though their views have been represented well and avoid as much surprise as possible when eventually publishing the draft for full public consultation.

After publication of the draft, some departments will be required to run a six-week statutory consultation. After a set period, the council will publish a comments and feedback document looking to consider all views expressed and respond to as many comments from residents as possible. A final document is then presented to leadership and becomes actionable. This is by no means a strict model for engagement at the council and in practice, the process is likely to have a great deal of variation in accordance with various contextual factors. Nonetheless, it demonstrates a level of internal organisation for the sake of having engagements follow through to results that councils ought to aspire towards.

Once results have been delivered into the public realm, there would typically be a period of reflection, once again with communication channels remaining open. This includes considerations of whether objectives were achieved, whether residents were engaged effectively enough, whether meaningful change occurred as the result of the engagement(s), etc.

As noted, the above processes will feed into a greater body of knowledge at the council which is accessible and goes on to inform council departments prior to them embarking on further engagements, as to internalise the findings from previous engagements better as well as avoiding the treading of already well-trodden ground.

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kensington & Chelsea developed a performance reporting dashboard – that has now started to be published externally. The reporting mechanism has been used internally for several years now and is the product of asking residents and community representatives to provide a general view of their sentiments toward the council and the borough writ large. The findings from this process are put on equal footing with internal data in terms of revealing how well the council is performing. The process also goes on to inform council vision, direction and decision-making around policy and practice.

However, despite this significant progress, staff still reported a lack of organisation-wide understanding at Kensington & Chelsea of the value that incorporating the experience and insights of residents into the internal fold of council policy and

practice can have. This suggests that, despite the increased proliferation of engagement information, there is still much progress to be made on this information changing hearts and minds across the council.

2.2.4 PRIORITY SETTING

Overview

Embedding a relational approach when internalising engagements allows for local priorities to be teased out. These priorities are also likely to be of higher quality and more amenable to the wider local population – as they are result of patterns of engagement and joint adaptation between a local authority and those engaged.

In setting priorities, it is best to first assess the progress made on previously raised resident priorities, what can be done in the short-term to address raised priorities and being honest about what the council is unable to do in relation to raised resident priorities. All these factors are crucial to managing resident expectations and not dooming the process to failure by overpromising.

The priority setting process will inevitably constitute a great deal of categorisation. The basis for this categorisation is action and its relevant characteristics: whether findings require action or not, whether action can be taken or not, whether this is done in the short-term, for the sake of quick, demonstrable ‘wins’, or the long-term, for more complex, strategic priorities. Crucial to this end is the importance assigned to each action, as this will heavily influence how much of a priority any given issue should go on to have. If a local authority is unable to capture the importance of such issues at this stage, this risks significant dissonance between a council’s eventual practice and what was raised by residents during consultations and engagements, thus causing further disillusionment with local government and its processes.

Then, again to be honest and manage resident expectations, findings should be reflected back on a local authority. There should be an immediate assessment of a local authority capacity to deliver on consultation findings and their relevant actions. There may be the need to readjust and communicate this process back to relevant residents, or open a consultation back up, with these internal limitations clearly laid out. Beyond

this, there is a need to identify next steps, who is involved and where, and how identified actions can be facilitated within existing budgets and schedules. This process will include developing a comms strategy, potential policy substance, as well as the logistics of action and delivery.

Finally, developing a set of clear intentions and outcomes, based on aforementioned processes and as a part of a summary of engagement findings, helps build trust within the council and have staff at all levels understand the process better. The result should not only be a set of priorities, distinctly informed by consultation and engagement findings, but also a plan of action for how these findings will be linked to tangible results. Having this be visible and communicated effectively will demonstrate that a local authority can and will act on findings.

Local context

With Kensington & Chelsea, there is a great deal of internal consultation and discussion amongst lead members, officers and other departmental staff responsible for particular policy areas. Engagement is seen as continuously ongoing by Kensington & Chelsea, and previous consultations and engagements are referenced and learned from.

Internally, Kensington & Chelsea has a Community Engagement Network; a group that meets quarterly, open to anyone within the organisation, that will typically focus on a given topic. Usually, between 50 and 100 people from the organisation will attend and it has been noted as a key mechanism for knowledge sharing, upskilling, and raising awareness of the different consultation and engagement techniques taking place in the borough. The network is facilitative of those who wish to attend in-person or online. On the one hand, this helps to spread knowledge gathered from engagements, on the other, this helps to establish key priorities that speak to local concerns as related by local stakeholders themselves. The data and evidence from this pool of knowledge will also be used by the leadership and executive management teams to inform their direction of travel and general strategy.

There has been a concerted effort from Kensington & Chelsea staff members to ensure that, after each consultation or engagement event, findings are being fed back into the council and internalised to produce results. This sets in motion a process

of issues discovery and priority-setting, developed through identifying patterns, trends and themes from relevant engagements. It was recognised that often these findings can go amiss, leading to poor future engagements that fail to improve. One staff member spoke of a previous tendency to compartmentalise community engagement as a matter for individuals departments, rather than the wholesale, council-wide strategy it has become since.

At its most effective, the priority-setting stage has included restoring communication channels, on the one hand to explain how contributions have informed decision-making thus far and, on the other, to invite further feedback on the set of outcomes that has been produced. These channels continue to stay open whilst the council feeds back to relevant local stakeholders, to ensure that actions and results are communicated effectively, and sustained participation is encouraged.

However, ensuring this stage is at this most effective standard has proved difficult for Kensington & Chelsea, suggesting a patchy approach to the priority-setting process. Despite initial high participation, the communication of subsequent priorities can often still be too instructive and closed-off to opportunities for further engagement or co-development. It may be the case that many are signed up to various communication channels, but feedback on priorities when laid out is undesirably low.

2.2.5 ACTIONS AND POLICY OPTIONS

Some possible actions and policy options to ensure that public engagement is internalised as crucial to policymaking within both council and community are listed below.

- Ensure that engagement events are held at familiar and accessible locations to target communities.
- Build mechanisms into the policy approval process that depend on local consultation being carried out.
- Ensure that all consultations are preceded by a review of previous engagement exercises to check that the question being asked is new to the target audience.
- Dedicate staff time and resources to understanding and minimising 'consultation

fatigue' by taking a holistic look at the consultation timeline of all policies and ensuring that communities are being spoken to in the most efficient and least repetitive manner.

- Ensure that the results of all consultations are specifically connected to policy outcomes in documents which are internally and externally available.
- Use examples of consultations and how their results are reflected in policy and the built environment as training materials to bring all staff on board with the idea of consultation and wider engagement as necessary to effective placemaking.
- Establish and support cross-departmental working groups to track consultations and their results.
- Create accountability mechanisms and regular reviews to ensure that trends and themes identified across consultations and wider engagement are monitored and reflected in policy.



2.3

PRACTISING

2.3.1	Who participates?	→
2.3.2	Modes of participation	→
2.3.3	Trust and relationships	→
2.3.4	Communication	→
2.3.5	Actions and policy options	→

The policy and practice of engagements is arguably where a local authority is most immediately present in its resident's lives. Therefore, understanding who participates, modes of participation, trust and relationships, and communication are essential to improving the practice of engagements and subsequent policy that arises out of each process. The common goal in practising engagements is to bridge the gap between the everyday living of citizens and the day-to-day governance and formal policymaking of local government.

2.3.1 WHO PARTICIPATES?

Overview

The question of who participates in engagement

is a major factor in the relative success or failure of initiatives. Research has shown a negative association between public managers' attitudes to public participation and perceived participant indifference, ulterior motives, and limited policy knowledge¹²¹³. The 2022 systematic review showed a positive association between public manager attitudes and participant turnout, competence, and how long participants are involved in a respective decision-making process.

As part of developing a locally-attuned understanding of community engagement, there should be a refinement of what is meant by community and other constituent units in a local area. This helps avoid conflation and allows for

¹² Eckerd & Heidelberg (2019) – Administering public participation

¹³ Migchelbrink & Van de Walle (2022) – A systematic review of the literature on determinants of public managers' attitudes toward public participation

engagement to be pragmatically operationalised when used within internal strategic documents and subsequent communication materials.

Whilst an understanding will be unique to place, there are some key aspects of the term community that are important to bear in mind. First, the term devoid of context is moot; a local authority must take it upon itself to ensure that the term is given context and therefore substance before it can be used operationally within the council. Otherwise, the term remains vague and unfocused. Secondly, whatever notions are used to understand a community, there must be a recognition that they will often overlap, interrelate, and become intersectional. A mere recognition of this is necessary, rather than attempting to make too rigid of a distinct when looking to encourage audiences to participate in engagements.

Sometimes the term community may not be all that appropriate in some circumstances. Services

are sometimes dealing with residents on an individual basis, and therefore engagement on these services may require a more individualised form of engagement on their betterment. Understanding this may be the case and factoring it into broader council strategy is key to navigating this.

In accordance with a relational approach and situational theory¹⁴¹⁵, it is useful for a local authority to consider categorising the (potential) audiences for engagements into ‘publics’ based upon their communication behaviour¹⁶.

- **Latent publics:** unaware of the issue or subject matter of the engagement.
- **Aware publics:** recognition of the issue and how they are affected.
- **Active publics:** communicated the issue and involved in taking action.

Engagement in practice: Kensington & Chelsea’s “al fresco revolution”

In response to the popularity of flexible ‘al fresco’ licensing that allowed businesses to trade more easily on pavements and pedestrianised streets, Kensington & Chelsea set up a six-week consultation in November 2021 with an intention to make this a formalised, seasonal addition to the council’s long-term licensing policy. This final consultation process followed a series of previous consultations and surveys from residents, businesses and regular visitors on high street interventions in the face of nationwide decline. Support for al fresco provision began to develop in these sessions.

Upon completion, it was found that 70 percent of respondents supported al fresco dining provision to remain beyond the end of central government COVID-19 restrictions in September 2022. Therefore, the council responded by approving new policies around area-specific business licensing, allowing for outdoor dining to be enabled on a seasonal basis, with special privileges for community activity and events all year round. The substance of these policy decisions was informed by prior consultation processes, even taking into account external surveys and drop-ins carried out by local landowners and third sector organisations.

This allows for a better idea of how engaged residents are as a snapshot, and better reveal what strategy and action can be developed to encourage a more populous active public.

Local context

Kensington & Chelsea is a particularly challenging place to get people engaged and

participating and there is a stark economic dimension to the borough’s population dynamics, with the north of the borough significantly more impoverished than elsewhere. This means that certain demographics and communities are harder to reach than others, and therefore require a more strategic approach to encouraging their participation – a notion Kensington & Chelsea

14 Ledingham (2009) – A chronology of organization-stakeholders relationships with recommendations concerning practitioner adoption of the relational perspective

15 Grunig (2000) – Collectivism, collaboration, and societal corporatism as core professional values in public relations

16 Johnston (2010) – Community engagement: exploring a relational approach to consultation and collaborative practice in Australia

is acutely aware and is actioning for. For the council, the element of communal trust has been noted as particularly important in the context of communities to the north of the borough, whereas in the southern reaches, engagement is pursued on more of a resident-by-resident basis.

Accommodating participants in practice should be a top priority for engagement practitioners in a local authority. Furthermore, engagement and participation are notably problematised in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, to the extent of requiring a different and often unique approach. Ultimately, there must be a fundamental recognition when approaching engagements that residents are busy people, with individual responsibilities. When dealing solely with in-person events, a local authority is typically dealing with a subsection of the local population that is time-rich, which is not representative of people's day-to-day living in the borough writ large.

Nonetheless, it is important to engage existing groups, such as community groups, local charities, and local businesses, because they are already formed, organised and exist as entities in the day-to-day living of many residents. However, for the sake of an engagement agenda that reflects the views of the borough, rather than a small proportion of time-rich individuals, there must be a mixed methods approach to community engagement.

To prevent engagement activity becoming doomed as a minority sport, it is important for local authorities to make it easier for as many people in the borough to participate that is accommodating of their day-to-day lives. Online tools have helped Kensington & Chelsea engage with typically harder to reach groups such as young people. However, there is still a struggle to sustain that engagement beyond social media interactions.

To go further in securing representative audiences, more effort must be made to reach typically hard-to-reach groups and neighbourhoods. Often this includes tactical oversampling and overselling to ensure that those interacting with engagements are representative of the area being targeted,

as ultimately the outcome will affect the broader population, not just those who participated in the process. Therefore, the more representative those who participate in the engagement process are, the more proportional to the needs of the broader population the outcome will be.

“In case where community engagement has gone exceptionally well, residents really bought into the process. Locals became more invested in place and identity because they saw it being reflected by their government.”

– Advisory panel member

2.3.2 MODES OF PARTICIPATION

Overview

In practice, public participation in policymaking typically fits under three modes – in-person, digital, and hybridised. Ultimately, councillors, officers, and practitioners will need to adopt a range of modes and practices to suit specific local circumstances. These modes, particularly post-pandemic, have become increasingly difficult to prescribe and are instead pursued dependent on department, demographic, location in the borough, and a whole host of other specific points of context.

When running an engagement, a local authority should also look to provide a mix of asking general questions about place as well as more specific questions of proposals and policy. This encourages a dialogue that invites people to express their everyday expertise of place and then have it related back to local governance and policy. It also allows for the members of staff on hand to take notes on the insights provided by people as experts on place and have this passed on to inform council decision-making – key to the internalisation process.

Instances of digital engagement are also said to be successful in accessing the views of those not able to commit time to in-person engagements – again, speaking to the wider reach of participants that digital engagement can unlock. This is reflected in relevant discourse and research on the phenomenon. For example, a 2016 study found a positive association between ICT-enabled

participation and the engagement of young people in local governance¹⁷.

However, whilst digital engagement can be used to supplement in-person by providing a more generalist, data-driven understanding that bypasses barriers to attending in-person, it was noted by several staff members that it can lack enough nuance to internalise and is not as conducive to relationship-building. Despite the necessities of the pandemic, there is a recognition in relevant literature, and by Kensington & Chelsea themselves that in-person modes of engagement, especially those present at pre-existing community events and neighbourhoods, are critical not just for enhancing citizen participation, but also for establishing a basis of trust on which to build on.

Allowing people to witness engagement happen in practice is helpful, which necessitates as many direct engagements as possible taking place in well-established local centres and hubs of social activity across the borough. This comes across as less artificial and more genuine, as residents recognise the links between the local authority, place and the engagement activity. It is much more likely to increase participation and strengthen engagement than having residents show up at a town hall according to rigid, unaccommodating timescales.

Being present in such a manner also demonstrates a proactive approach from a local authority perspective, and building trust in this manner is critical to seeing local participation move beyond tokenism and consultation towards genuine citizen power and influence.

Local context

Kensington & Chelsea staff spoke of the need to develop a nuanced understanding of how communities and subsections within communities are best engaged with. Some are time-poor and unable to attend face-to-face meetings, others do not engage digitally and would prefer to be approached individually, etc. There is an array of factors that should be considered to avoid too prescriptive of an engagement model.

A staff member noted that this realisation

permeated the organisation over the course of the pandemic, when more online tools of engagement were used and the council experienced an uptick in young people and others who were not typically heard from, whilst also finding it harder to reach those who were previously well-engaged. This prompted the council to develop a more nuanced approach to engaging different parts of the borough to reach a wider audience in aggregate.

When an engagement process is being prepared, the council tends to set up multiple platforms to facilitate engagement. Typically, this will be a mix of digital avenues, where they can reach a wider audience and encourage the views of those with little time to attend in-person, and in-person avenues, such as face-to-face meetings with residents, focus groups, and other local stakeholders.

For Kensington & Chelsea, young people were more responsive to digital engagement deployed over the pandemic, and such tactics encouraged many who were previously unengaged. Yet despite progress using online tools, Kensington & Chelsea still struggles to hear from some groups on more specific matters of local governance. It is suspected that these matters are more technical in nature and more time-demanding, therefore less likely to inspire engagement without adjustments.

2.3.3 TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS

Overview

Placemaking is an undoubtably complex and messy process, but rather than trying to manage away complexities, a local authority should embrace the inherent complexity of local identity, how it relates to place, and how this, ultimately, should be reflected in policy. Understanding emotional aspects of locality and how they might be inspired is critical to the betterment of any place through redevelopment and regeneration.

Building trust is key to enabling a participatory local democracy. Part of that trust building is for people of the borough to see themselves reflected in the political process, beyond just electoral representation. This allows residents to identify and relate to local democracy in a way that

17 Thijssen & Van Dooren (2016) – Going online: does ICT enabled participation engage the young in local governance?

inspires involvement and sustained participation, as well as contributing towards necessary foundations of trust that the local political will listen, learn and deliver.

In practice, it is important to not steer clear of and try to navigate around emotional aspects of engagement – as there is often a tendency to do so. Contrary to common practice, developing an emotional connection to participants, building trust, allows for a shared foundation to be built upon.

This foundation sees everyone broadly vying for the same outcome, the betterment of the place where they live. Striking this connection and not shying away from more unconventional ways of gathering information about place supplements more traditional methods of data collection, eventually seeing all working toward a more humane view of the borough and its issues that is rooted in bottom-up engagements.

Local context

Kensington & Chelsea have begun to embrace their borough's complex and multifaceted local identity. This started with a recognition that council staff were by-in-large not embedded in the borough and the extent of their day-to-day living was spent commuting to and from the Town Hall. Therefore, relinquishing a more paternal mindset and instead recognising that it is residents who spend the majority of their day-to-day in and around the borough and therefore it is they who should be advising on matters of place.

The council are leveraging this ongoing understanding as a basis on which to pursue engagements and subsequent policy. Sometimes individual engagements will have to amount to little more than open and dynamic trust-building exercises to strike that emotional connection and shared sense of working towards the betterment of a place.

A staff member at Kensington & Chelsea spoke of a particularly challenging workshop run by the council early on in their recently refreshed engagement agenda. There was a great deal of warranted mistrust and scepticism that permeated

the room, resulting in staff members spending the entirety of the time taking note of concerns and building trust in a recently renewed process by laying out the change in approach in plain language in a distinctly relational manner. The staff member said this particular workshop and the trust that it began to build was critical to the success the engagement process eventually saw.

2.3.4 COMMUNICATION

Overview

Good communication is critical in actively demonstrating that good practice is happening in the council because of an ongoing push toward wider engagement and genuinely participation. Without good, well-managed channels of communication, there is a risk that linkages will not be made between engagements and results and residents may begin to become disillusioned with the process due to feeling out of the loop. The way in which communication is framed that has implications for how residents define an issue, identify causes, make value judgements and come up with potential solutions.

Spicer puts forward two broad framing devices in this regard¹⁸. **Advocacy communication** is a one-way frame, wherein which a local authority is speaking *at* residents through a series of monologue-like modes. When the dominant frame in a local authority's approach to communicating with residents, advocacy communication can be regarded as tokenistic. However, when used as part of an integrated communication strategy, advocacy has a noble role in informing residents and catalysing dialogue¹⁹.

Regarding such an integrated communication strategy, **collaborative communication** ought to be the centralised approach. This communication frame encourages a more contextualised engagement process that is conducive to building relationships and open, ongoing dialogue between a local authority and its residents.

Flexibility is also a key aspect of good communication when engaging, as, rather than necessarily pre-establishing multiple channels

18 Spicer (1997) – Organisational public relations: a political perspective

19 Heath (2007) – Management through advocacy: Reflection rather than domination

of communication, there is value in allowing communication to remain open and thus enabled wherever it may prove useful. This also allows communication to become more than just informing and gathering feedback, encouraging and developing a conversational, partnership model of communicating which feeds into the council's functionality as it happens. This keeps residents well-informed of ongoing processes and encourages them to feel comfortable enough in approaching the council with concerns beyond formalised, 'stuffer' channels of communication.

When engaging and encouraging participation in practice, the presentation of materials is key. The language that is used and how it can be made more engaging is very important to the relative success of community engagements. It is also important to ensure that engagements are as open and inclusive as is most appropriate. This includes in terms of audience but also in terms of parameters, structures and opportunities to contribute.

This also includes being clear on parameters set out, existing red lines, and how exactly views will be used to produce outcomes should be explained well and from the outset. Communicating and updating those previously consulted or ongoing participants is vital to the sustainability of a participatory model of local democracy. Encouraging wider audiences has an inevitable public relations angle to it. There must be a certain level of advertisement and communication informing people that engagements are happening, and they are producing results.

Local context

Local government is often criticised for making governance inaccessible to residents, due to rigid structures, excessive bureaucracy, and overuse of internal jargon in public reports and other instances of communication. Kensington & Chelsea have begun to recognise this as a council and some departments are acting to ensure that communications with residents are presented in plainer, more relatable language.

The communities team tries to be as concrete in their language as possible, shaping it in a way that is easy to understand and is relatable to residents and communities in the borough. A staff

member in the council's planning department spoke of tailoring their communications and the language they use to a wider audience in the borough, with the hope that even residents with little interest or knowledge of planning are encouraged to engage in the department's ongoing engagement processes. Many other staff members spoke of attempts to make communications around engagements much more 'plain language' and rid of overly bureaucratic and inaccessible vocabulary.

In a huge organisation such as Kensington & Chelsea, communication is arguably the most important aspect of successfully understanding, internalising and practising resident engagement towards a genuinely participatory local democracy. Ensuring that information is communicated across departments and dialogue is kept open for feedback is critical in ensuring that the day-to-day functionality of the council is continually improving, and a mindfulness of resident impact is always developing.

The council has several community-facing communication channels, such as a newsletter and other digital and social platforms. It is part of the organisation's ongoing strategy to internalise learnings from engagement, to act on these learnings, and communicate results back to residents and communities. The increased use of digital and online means of engagement due to the pandemic resulted in the council reaching a wider audience – with groups previously disengaged, most notably young people, becoming increasingly likely to respond.

Each engagement exercise at the council has a 'we asked, you said, we did' aspect that is published online as part of Kensington & Chelsea's wider digital consultation platform. This aspect looks to summarise activity into very simple, plain language paragraphs. Comprehensive, detailed reports are still made public nonetheless, but this digital digest offers a more widely accessible and informative way of connecting council activity to residents and their place.

As a key channel of communication and feedback, Kensington & Chelsea have established a citizens' panel of approximately 2,000 residents to provide a meta level analysis of

the council's performance in accordance with resident's vision of the borough as experts on place.

To ensure this analysis is representative of the borough writ large, the citizens' panel is balanced according to gender, ethnicity, and whereabouts in the borough. The panel is consulted quarterly on key issues – such as community safety – and certain aspects of local governance – such as the local plan and its priorities. The process is comprehensive and produces insight that go on to inform council vision, strategy, policy and action – as well as further specific engagements going forward.

Despite being a recent development, many staff reported that the citizens' panel has been successful in raising the standards of council services, identifying local priorities, informing decision-making, and improving the internal perceptions of the value of engaging residents in local governance.

2.3.5 ACTIONS AND POLICY OPTIONS

Some possible actions and policy options to enhance and expand the practice of public engagement are listed below.

- Build into consultation and engagement strategy clear explanations of what methods are to be used and how each method will effectively target different communities.
- Engage in “tactical oversampling” of hard-to-reach communities to ensure that consultations are genuinely representative.
- Visualise and – where possible – quantify the balance between online and in-person consultation as part of external communications on engagement.
- Continuously develop and expand online consultation tools to maximise the accessibility and clarity of information on where and how residents can influence local government policy and function.
- Provide opportunities beyond issue-by-issue consultation for residents to air frustrations or grievances with local process and policymaking.
- Publish and widely communicate the results of

consultations and wider engagement activity and how they have been taken forward in policy.

- Ensure that language used is accessible as possible, avoiding the abstract where possible, and use language familiar to residents.

CHAPTER 3

ACTIONS AND POLICY OPTIONS SUMMARY

UNDERSTANDING

- Design consultations to identify areas which residents feel are points of shame for the borough.
- Build an understanding of different types of interaction – reactive, directive and proactive – into council engagement strategy and staff training.
- Ensure that public engagement makes clear to residents participating what stage of policy formulation they are informing, with a particular focus on engagement at the earliest possible stage.
- Regularly review policy ‘redlines’ for engagement with an emphasis on reduction and resident negotiation wherever possible.
- Form cross-departmental working groups for individual regeneration projects that can be accountable for ensuring consultation results relating to the public realm are integrated across the multifaceted action involved in development.

INTERNALISING

- Ensure that engagement events are held at familiar and accessible locations to target communities.
- Build mechanisms into the policy approval process that depend on local consultation being carried out.
- Ensure that all consultations are preceded by a review of previous engagement exercises to check that the question being asked is new to the target audience.
- Dedicate staff time and resources to understanding and minimising ‘consultation fatigue’ by taking a holistic look at the consultation timeline of all policies and ensuring that communities are being spoken to in the most efficient and least repetitive manner.
- Ensure that the results of all consultations are specifically connected to policy outcomes in documents which are internally and externally available.
- Use examples of consultations and how their results are reflected in policy and the built environment as training materials to bring all staff on board with the idea of engagement as necessary to effective placemaking.
- Establish and support cross-departmental working groups to track ongoing engagements and their results.
- Create accountability mechanisms and regular reviews to ensure that trends and themes identified across engagements are monitored and reflected in policy.

PRACTISING

- Build into consultation and engagement strategy clear explanations of what methods are to be used and how each method will effectively target different communities.
- Engage in ‘tactical oversampling’ of hard-to-reach communities to ensure that consultations are genuinely representative.
- Visualise and – where possible – quantify the balance between online and in-person consultations, as part of external communications on wider engagements.
- Continuously develop and expand online engagement tools to maximise the accessibility and clarity of information on where and how residents can influence local government policy and function.
- Provide opportunities beyond issue-by-issue consultation for residents to air frustrations or grievances with local process and policymaking.
- Publish and widely communicate the results of consultations and wider engagement activity and how they have been taken forward in policy.
- Ensure that language used is accessible as possible, avoiding the abstract where possible, and use language familiar to residents.



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