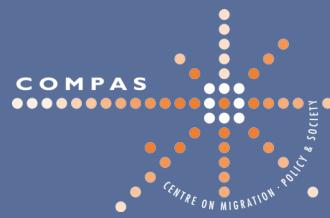


RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF SOUTHWARK

Executive Summary

March 2015



Mette Louise Berg

Southwark's first long-term housing strategy was agreed in January 2015. It includes a pledge to build 11,000 new council homes for rent by 2043, with the aim of improving access to affordable, good quality housing in the borough. The pledge responds to the borough's substantial housing needs, which reflect London-wide challenges: The population is growing and the demand for affordable homes far exceeds supply.

Southwark is a 'super-diverse' central London borough characterised by ethnic and linguistic diversity, high demographic churn amid overall population growth, and increasing socio-economic stratification. These characteristics add up to a dynamic and challenging environment in which to foster resident involvement and resilience. The challenge is even greater in a context of central government cuts to local authority funding. Southwark's new long-term housing strategy offers an opportunity to think innovatively about how best to engage residents and make the most of Southwark's diversity.

The report highlights innovative, inclusive, and sustainable ways of fostering resident involvement from strategic and long-term developments for lasting change (Big Local, Tenant Management Organisations) to small-scale initiatives (community gardens, football projects).

Key recommendations

1. The council should continue to work in a strategic manner with voluntary and charitable groups in the borough to mutually support projects and initiatives;
2. The council should draw on the considerable experience and insights of TMOs across the borough;
3. The council should continue to engage with residents via T&RAs where they exist, and to support collaboration between T&RAs;
4. The council should seek alternative and creative funding sources and income streams to support its resident involvement initiatives.



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The report also considers barriers to resident involvement, which are multi-causal, diverse and mutually interacting, including:

1. Employment, socio-economic, and life-style factors (anti-social working hours, lack of time, social isolation, isolation between estates)
2. Socio-demographic and socio-cultural factors (population churn, increasing language diversity and language barriers, mistrust and fear of authorities and other residents)
3. Capacity, skills, and reputational issues (lack of familiarity with involvement structures, lack of experience in setting up constituted groups and accessing funding, council seen as remote)

There are many successful examples of innovative resident involvement in Southwark. There is potential to scale out larger projects, i.e. seeking to extend projects to more estates and wider areas; and to scale up smaller projects such as football training and community gardens. This should be done in a way that seeks to tie projects in with strategies to up-skill volunteers and get residents into employment, as well as promoting inclusion, improving public health, and resident well-being, consistent with the Fairer Future promises as set out in the Council Plan.

It is important that the council continues to engage with residents across a range of different organisational platforms, including Tenant and Resident Associations (T&RAs), but also through schools, youth clubs, and community organisations, and via social media, to ensure that as diverse a range of residents as possible is reached.

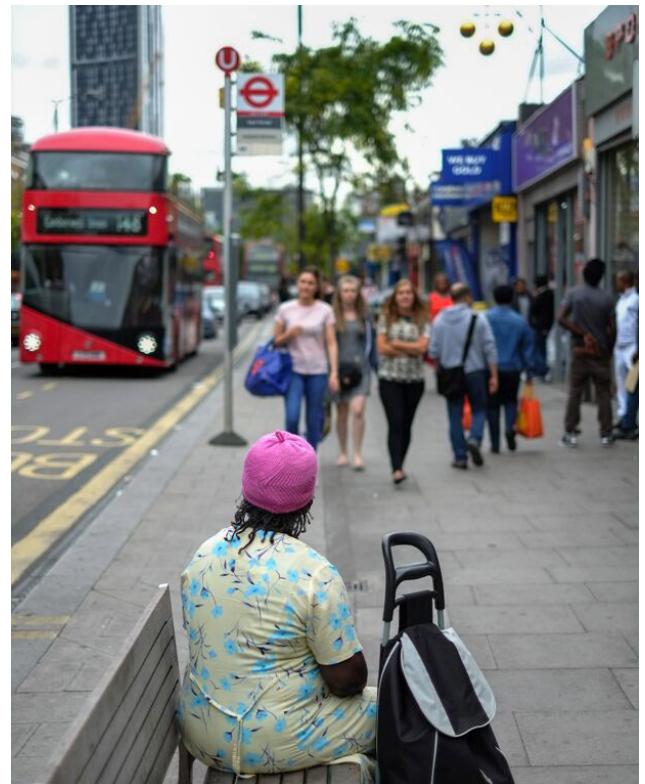


Photo: Simon Rowe / CACAO

Research for this report was conducted by Mette Louise Berg (COMPAS, University of Oxford) with assistance from Ahmed Kabba and Sylvia Velasquez. Ben Gidley (COMPAS) contributed to research and writing. The author wishes to thank the many Southwark residents and volunteers who gave their time to help with the research and talk about their experiences. The author also wishes to acknowledge the helpful comments by Stephen Douglass, Stephen Gaskell, Brian O'Neill, and Darryl Telles (Southwark), and Ole Jensen (COMPAS) on draft versions. The research was funded by an ESRC Impact Accelerator Account Knowledge Exchange Fellowship, October 2014 – June 2015. During the fellowship Mette Louise Berg has been a 'researcher in residence' with the London Borough of Southwark, which offered extensive support and assistance with the research, and whose officers were generous with their time and expertise. The author especially wishes to thank Claire Linnane and John Morteo in the Chief Executive's Department for support throughout the research. The financial support of the ESRC is gratefully acknowledged. Any errors or shortcomings remain the author's.