



c/o Museum of Brands
111-117 Lancaster Road
London W11 1QT

Telephone: 020 7243 9800
Email: info@kcsc.org.uk
Website: www.kcsc.org.uk

registered company no. 4146375
charity no. 1087457

KCSC response to the RBKC Charter for Public Participation – 13 December 2019

At the beginning of the consultation process in September the Social Council submitted a paper in conjunction with the Grenfell Network Group which proposed a very different but constructive approach to the basis, principles and structure of a Charter to the one circulated in draft by the Council. We hoped that by submitting a paper at such an early stage this would provide an early opportunity for the Council to develop further its thinking during the consultation period.

We have subsequently met Robert Sheppard to discuss in some detail the Council's paper, and we have hosted a public meeting which enabled those present to critique both the Council's draft Charter and the principles in our paper.

This paper represents our formal response. You will see that we strongly urge the Council, in the spirit of the Charter's content, now to produce a fresh draft informed by the responses received for a final consultation before a Charter becomes part of the Borough's Constitution. There are issues of trust which still need to be resolved if this Charter is to gain credence.

The Borough's current draft

At our meeting with Robert Sheppard those present who included members of the KCSC Committee and of the Grenfell Network Group voiced strong criticisms of the draft :

- The document is much too 'Council-centred' and should be reorientated so that it is about it is more focussed on what residents will experience and can contribute beyond the formal rights listed later in the document.
- It should give not only a sense or feeling but an actuality of more control by local people, which includes genuine empowerment.
- It has no clear structure or operational framework.
- The Council should not assume it knows when to consult, co-design or co-produce (and should not include such jargon). The Council first needs to establish when and where and how local people wish to participate.
- It should also not assume that it knows what local people need in terms of information in order that they can respond meaningfully.
- The local community should be seen by Council officers and members as an untapped resource, and the value of this should shine out from the Charter.
- There is a lack of reference to accountability. How will the Council be held to account on its Charter commitments ?
- How will 'scrutiny' proactively involve local people ?

At the later public meeting on 4 December further points were made, which Robert Sheppard noted and which include :

- There was strong feeling that the Council should replace the current draft with a Charter based on the principles and framework which KCSC had already proposed (see further below).
- The Council has work to do to engage different sections of the community, including especially private tenants.
- To assist the flow of information Ward Councillors need to be informed in advance about all decisions that affect residents.
- Commitment is needed to publish the Council's reasoned response to consultations and to petitions.
- Disrupting a meeting can be legitimate if the decisions being made appear to be illegitimate.
- Access to information online alone cannot be considered inclusive.
- Greater transparency in decision making, including on who the Council is engaging with under the Charter and what has led to decisions taken after consultation.
- Willingness in agreeing to answer community requests for Freedom of Information.

In addition many of the earlier points were reiterated.

The Social Council's response

We want the Borough to take strong account of all the comments and proposals noted above. We also want the Borough to give close attention to the structure and principles of the document dated 20 September 2019 which we submitted at the start of the consultation and which is attached again for reference.

This draws closely on good practice established by the International Association for Public Participation. We have proposed already that these principles be incorporated in the proposed RBKC Charter and that requires very substantial redrafting of the consultation draft in order to structure and operationalise the Charter.

In particular that means :

- Setting out the varying **levels** of participation as we do in that paper.
- Setting out a **goal** for each level of participation so that **promises** can be made on the expected outcome and the success in meeting the goals can be measured.
- Setting out a series of **standards** such as those set out in our paper for successful participation, with the standard to be achieved on each.
- Setting out the **evidence** required to be produced against each standard, to ensure Council accountability and transparency.

If the above were to be achieved in the final Charter and successfully implemented we believe the Council's Charter might become something of a beacon in the United Kingdom. It would certainly help strongly with the restoration of trust in the Council which is still so badly needed from parts of the community.

In operational terms it may also be sensible to draw together points made both in the sections above and in the Borough's own paper under :

- Preparation (the type of participation)
- Involvement
- Implementation
- Outcomes, and
- Sustainability / Accountability (to ensure this promotes trust)
- With a section on 'Don'ts'

Conclusion

The Council should use the input from ourselves and others from this stage of consultation to produce a new draft Charter which evidences that the Council has listened to the valid points made. The Administration Committee in January should be asked, in view of the critical need to gain trust for this exercise, to show their good intent by putting out this new draft for a further period for comment and critique before a final Charter is agreed by full Council.