



Influencing Policy in Southwark: The Full Guide

Spring 2015

Introduction

Everyone is impacted in one way or another by policy decisions and strategies, whether on child protection, how health services are provided, the organisation of public transport or care services for older people.

The voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Southwark is impacted **directly** by policy decisions. Council decisions on the level of support to the sector, or whether to award service delivery contracts to local organisations, have obvious impacts.

CAS has put together this guide with the aim of examining different ways in which you can **influence council policy**. We hope that you find it useful, and that it enables you to get your policy message across.

Contents

- 1. Why influence policy?**
- 2. Overview of Southwark Council**
 - 2.1 Council assembly, cabinet and committees
 - 2.2 Community Councils
 - 2.3 Council departmental structure
- 3. Influencing policy through council channels**
 - 3.1 Public questions at council meetings
 - 3.2 Taking a deputation
 - 3.3 Consultations
 - 3.4 Petitions
 - 3.5 Influencing council budget-setting
 - 3.6 Using the Localism Act and Sustainable Communities Act
 - 3.7 Local Councillors and Southwark Youth Council
- 4. Influencing policy through CAS and the VCS**
 - 4.1 CAS representation on council strategic partnerships
 - 4.2 Health and social care
 - 4.3 CAB and other forums
- 5. Central and regional government, London Citizens, local media**
 - 5.1 Central government
 - 5.2 National voluntary sector organisations and think-tanks
 - 5.3 Regional, London Citizens and the local media
- 6. Policymaker perspective and effective influencing**
 - 6.1 The policymaker's perspective: trends and drivers

1. Why influence policy?

Everyone in Southwark, including voluntary and community organisations, should have an interest in influencing policy. 'Policy' is a very broad term; in this short guide we define it as

“a set of ideas and proposals for action, culminating in a decision taken by local (or other levels of) government. It is how the state addresses (or doesn't address) issues that affect the public, which can be done through regulation, legislation, funding priorities or other actions”

'Influencing' may mean a number of things:

- **Challenging** an existing policy that has negative or harmful effects.
- **Preventing** a proposed policy from being enacted.
- **Proposing** a better alternative to existing policy.
- **Contributing** to the development of policies and strategies.

In reality, attempts to influence policy rarely result in the implementation of the exact policy we would like to see. But refusing to try would mean that policymakers are less able to take the needs and concerns of vulnerable people into account when designing policy.

This paper broadly outlines the various ways in which organisations and citizens in Southwark can influence policy. It focuses on the borough level, highlighting routes into Southwark council's decision-making processes, but also touches on central government policymaking in parliament as well as regional policymaking. It aims to raise awareness of the range of ways to influence policymakers, as well as highlight practical ways of staying informed of policymaking processes and decisions.

Influencing policy is a difficult art, requiring knowledge, relationships, evidence and resources. However, anyone can influence policy and CAS is here to support organisations in Southwark who want to do so and need a bit of extra support. Do get in touch with CAS (see Appendix 1) to explore how we can influence policymakers together.

See NCVO's website for a more in-depth understanding of [how to influence policy](#).

2. Overview of Southwark council

A basic understanding of how Southwark council is structured is helpful for knowing the various ways of influencing policy. The council can be split into two broad arms:

1. The **decision-making arm**, which consists of the 'council assembly' – the meeting of all 63 elected councillors from different political parties – the ruling party 'cabinet' and the subject-specific committees and sub-committees.

2. The **operational arm**, which is non-political and consists of the Chief Executive and the departmental strategic heads and officers. It formulates, implements and evaluates policy, overseeing the delivery of public services.

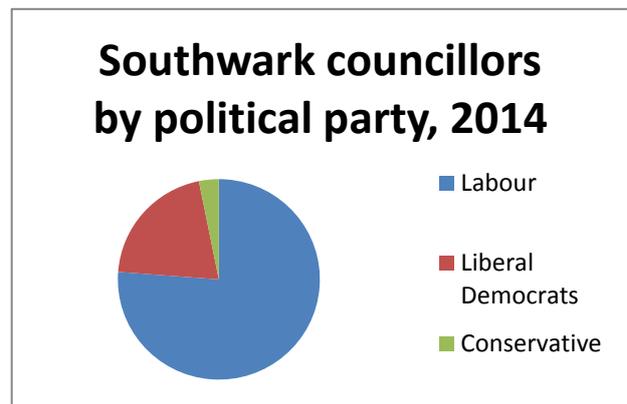
2.1 Council assembly, cabinet and committees

While the detail of policy proposals is developed by council officers, policy decisions are ultimately made by the **council assembly**, the council's decision-making body. The assembly is made up of all **63 elected councillors** in the borough – three for each of the 21 electoral wards – drawn from multiple political parties. At the last election in May 2014, the following were elected:

- 48 Labour councillors
- 13 Liberal Democrats
- 2 Conservatives

Labour has a majority of councillors, meaning they are able to vote through their preferred policies.

Council assembly meetings are **public**, fulfilling the legal requirement on councils to make important decisions in public and enabling residents to hold to account their [elected councillors](#) for how they vote and the decisions they reach. The full [assembly, cabinet and committee structure](#) of the council is set out in Figure 1 below.



Assembly meetings are held every two or three months in different venues around the borough. They are chaired by the **Mayor of Southwark**, [Cllr Dora Dixon-Fyle](#). While the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are Labour councillors, the role of Mayor is non-political, representing all sections of the community and presiding over council meetings so they are carried out fairly and efficiently. The current **Deputy Mayor** is [Cllr Kath Whittam](#).

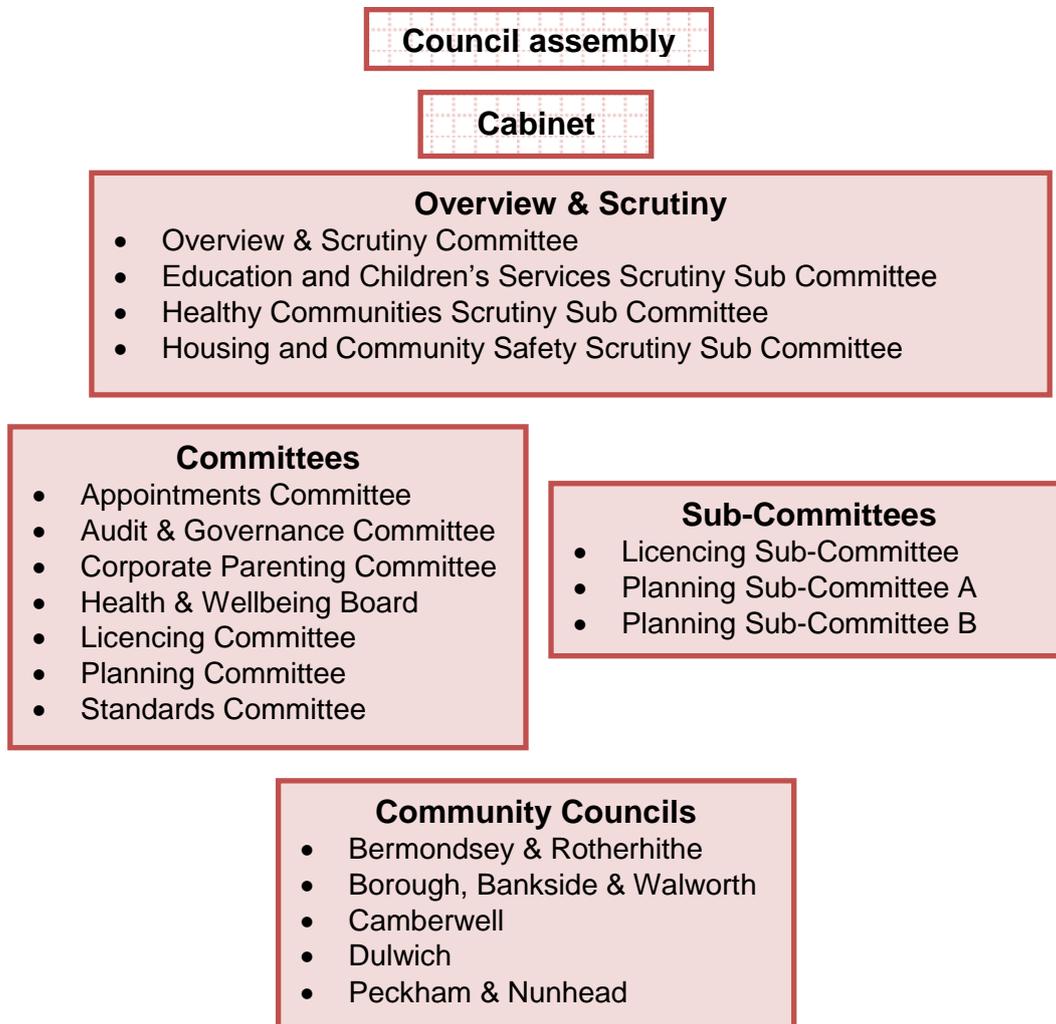
One of the council assembly's [core functions](#) is to approve the **policy framework**, which includes the following plans and strategies:

- Children and young person's plan
- Sustainable community strategy
- Youth justice plan
- Policy on community councils (see 2.2)
- Corporate plan
- Treasury management strategy
- Parts of the development plan framework

The **Leader of the Council** – currently [Cllr Peter John](#) – provides overall strategic leadership for the council, including setting council priorities. The Leader's [responsibilities](#) also include appointing a **Deputy Leader** and members of the **cabinet**. The [cabinet](#) is a smaller group of approximately 10 councillors (or 'members') of the ruling party – currently the Labour party – with particular policymaking responsibilities and powers. These include drafting the **policy**

framework and **budget** which then have to be **approved by the council assembly**. Following approval, the cabinet then takes decisions on how to implement these.

Figure 1. Council assembly, cabinet and committee structure



Other cabinet responsibilities include:

- Ensuring that the development of the council's policy framework and other key strategic documents and key decisions are open to wider input and **consultation**
- Being the focus for forming **partnerships** with local public, private and voluntary and community sector organisations to address local needs
- **Overseeing services** provided by the local authority

Each **cabinet member** has a particular area of responsibility, or ‘**portfolio**’. [The cabinet](#) is currently made up of the following Labour party councillors:

- Leader of the Council, [Cllr Peter John](#)

- [Cllr Ian Wingfield](#) - Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Business, Employment and Culture
- [Cllr Fiona Colley](#) - Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation and Performance
- [Cllr Stephanie Cryan](#) - Cabinet Member for Adult Care and Financial Inclusion
- [Cllr Barrie Hargrove](#) - Cabinet Member for Public Health, Parks and Leisure
- [Cllr Mark Williams](#) - Cabinet Member for Regeneration and New Homes
- [Cllr Victoria Mills](#) - Cabinet Member for Children and Schools
- [Cllr Richard Livingstone](#) - Cabinet Member for Housing
- [Cllr Darren Merrill](#) - Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm
- [Cllr Michael Situ](#) - Cabinet Member for Communities and Safety

The cabinet meets on average once a month, except in August. Meetings are open to the public and are generally held at the council headquarters at 160 Tooley Street.

Cabinet decisions can be investigated by the **scrutiny committees**. These committees can look at particular decisions in depth and examine council services, activities and policies. They can also review other organisations providing services in the borough, including voluntary sector providers.

The body co-ordinating this work is the **Overview & Scrutiny committee**. It appoints three scrutiny sub-committees looking at particular areas:

- [Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee](#)
- [Healthy Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee](#)
- [Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee](#)

A **forward plan**, prepared for the Leader, contains details of all the upcoming key decisions to be taken by the cabinet and other council staff. It is [published online](#) and is a good way of knowing what policy issues will be discussed and decided on in the coming months.

2.2 Community councils

[Community councils](#) are forums for people and groups to discuss local matters and influence council decisions. They are chaired by an [elected councillor](#) and tend to focus on issues such as community safety, environmental improvements and traffic management. They are an explicit part of the council's decision-making process, with the cabinet and council assembly accepting key points and concerns emerging from them.

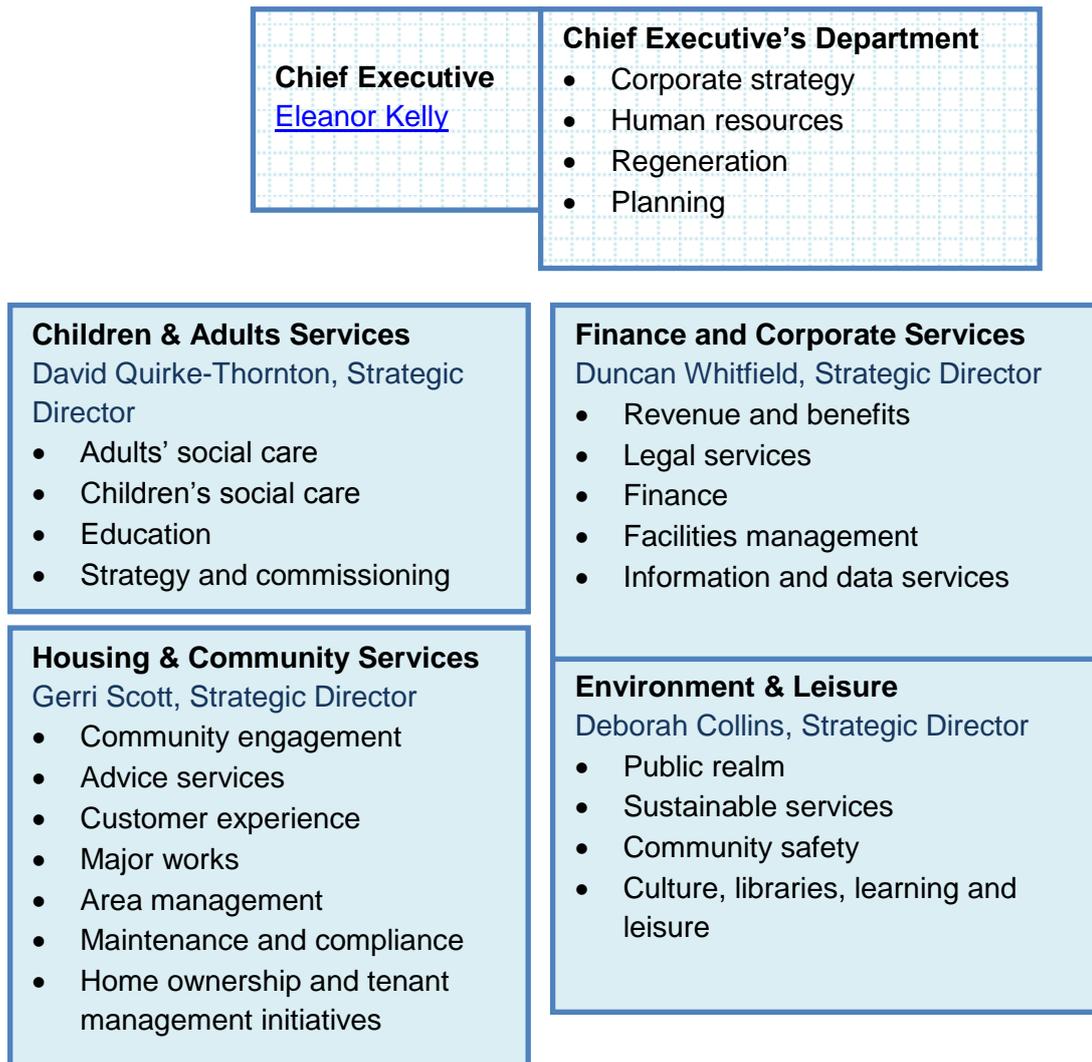
There are five community councils, following a recent rationalisation from eight, covering five parts of the borough:

- [Bermondsey & Rotherhithe](#)
- [Borough, Bankside & Walworth](#)
- [Camberwell](#)
- [Dulwich](#)
- [Peckham and Nunhead](#)

2.3 Council departmental structure

While policy *decisions* are made in the cabinet and council assembly, the council’s operational departments formulate in detail and implement policy. Figure 2 shows the council’s departmental [structure](#), with each department responsible for policy in the areas indicated. The strategic directors of each department, who hold authority in these policy areas, are also listed.

Figure 2. Southwark council departmental structure



3. Influencing policy through council channels

Having described the structure of the council and the function of its different arms, this chapter outlines some of the particular ways in which citizens and VCS organisations can

influence council policy. Council assembly and cabinet meetings, which can be attended by members of the public, are important routes; indeed, the council's recent [Democracy Commission](#) recommended a number of ways to make these meetings more open to the community and give residents a stronger voice in policymaking.

It is worth being familiar with the council's **constitutional team**, which provides support to local residents and organisations wanting to engage with and contribute to the council's decision-making processes. See contact details in Appendix 1.

3.1 Public questions at council meetings

Council assembly meetings are held every two or three months at different community-based venues. The timing and weekdays of meetings are now more flexible to enable public participation.

There are 30 minutes allocated at assembly meetings to public questions. Anyone who lives or works in Southwark can [ask one question](#) of the Leader of the council, a cabinet member or a chair of a committee. Any question relevant to the borough can be asked, as long as it follows procedure. The [basic steps](#) are shown in Box 1.

Box 1. Procedure for asking a public question at council assembly meetings

- Check the online council meeting [calendar online](#) or by calling 020 7525 7288.
- Post or email your question to the council's constitutional team at least nine clear days before the meeting. Include details of
 - the question you want to ask (no longer than 50 words)
 - the name or position of the councillor to whom you want to pose the question (the constitutional team can advise on this)
 - your name and contact details.
- At the meeting, the Mayor will invite you to come forward and ask the question. The Mayor may ask it on your behalf if you are unable to attend.
- You will receive a written response at the meeting, after which you will be invited to ask a further question in person on the same issue.
- The council may refer the issue to the cabinet or relevant committee.

Following the recommendations of the Democracy Commission, council assembly meetings are now **themed**. Knowing these themes in advance will help organisations target particular meetings to try and influence debates and advocate particular positions or recommendations.

People living or working in Southwark can also ask questions at **cabinet meetings**. The [procedure](#) for doing so is very similar to that of asking questions at assembly meetings, one difference being that questions must be emailed or posted to the constitutional team **three days** before the meeting (not nine days). The person submitting the question has to attend the meeting and ask the question during the 15 minutes allocated to public questions, with questions being asked in the order they were received.

Action: Be aware of forthcoming meetings by bookmarking the [calendar](#) of council assembly, cabinet, committee and community council meeting and subscribe to the [RSS news feed](#) for council assembly updates. Remember to look at the meeting themes.

Meetings of the council's **scrutiny committees** are also generally open to the public, with each of the four committees (see Fig 1) meeting six times a year.

Action: Be aware of what the issues scrutiny committees are investigating by subscribing to the RSS news feeds for the 1) [Overview & Scrutiny](#); 2) [Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee](#) 3) [Healthy Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee](#) 4) [Housing & Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee](#)

Public questions may be **rejected** on a number of grounds:

- The question is not about a matter for which the council has responsibility, or which affects Southwark.
- The question is defamatory, frivolous or offensive.
- The question is too similar to a question asked within the last six months for council assembly, or three months for cabinet meetings.
- The question requires disclosure of exempt information.

The public can attend [council committee meetings](#) (e.g. planning), although they may be excluded for particular agenda items. There is no time allocated for public questions in committees.

There is also an opportunity for public questions at **community council** meetings, which are chaired by elected councillors. Further, each community council can **submit one question to council assembly**, on a topic previously discussed at [community council](#).

3.2 Taking a deputation

Deputations are similar to public questions but involve a small group of up to six people expressing a view and asking questions at **council assembly, cabinet** and other council meetings. Deputations can only be made by people who live or work in Southwark.

Recent examples from [March 2012](#) include Southwark Carers requesting to address the council assembly to raise awareness of hidden carers, and Southwark Pensioners Forum arguing that the cabinet should have an advisor specifically on older people's issues. The [procedure](#) for making deputations, outlined in Box 2, is similar to that for asking questions.

Box 2. Procedure for taking a deputation to council assembly or cabinet meetings

- Check the meeting [calendar](#).
- Post a request to the constitutional team no later than three days before the day of the meeting.
- Include an outline of what issue the deputation will raise and the name and address of the person who will lead the deputation by speaking at the meeting.
- The council meeting can choose to accept or reject the deputation.
- At the meeting, the chair will invite a single deputation spokesperson to speak for five minutes. Councillors may ask questions immediately after and any member of the deputation may respond.
- The constitutional team will write to the deputation after the meeting, including details of any decisions.

3.3 Consultations

One of the best-known methods of informing policymaking is through responding to council **consultations**. [Consultations](#) are an opportunity for citizens and organisations to give their views on council policy as it is being developed. Voluntary organisations in Southwark have experience of (and evidence from) delivering services to disadvantaged and vulnerable people and so are often well-placed to comment on, shape and challenge council policy by writing a consultation response. CAS aims to support organisations to respond either by themselves or in partnership with us.

Box 3. Things to think about when responding to a consultation¹

- **Is it worthwhile?** Producing a policy response of adequate quality requires staff time and other resources. Consider whether the issue at hand is sufficiently important and relevant to warrant a response. If larger infrastructure organisations such as CAS (or NCVO) are already responding, consider whether it would be more efficient to feed your concerns, experiences and recommendations into their responses.
- **Introduce yourself.** Include a short introduction to your organisation and why you are in position to speak with authority, i.e. your experience working with a particular disadvantaged or vulnerable group.
- **Brevity.** Consultations often include a list of questions and short, clear responses to these are more likely to be taken seriously than long, rambling, unfocused points. However, you should only respond to the questions you want and are able to. Responses running into 4 pages or more should include a very short executive summary of key points at the start. In general you should be able to make your headline points in a few sentences – if you cannot then this may tell you that your points are unclear and therefore unlikely to be taken seriously.
- **Include evidence.** Responses are more likely to be taken seriously when they include supporting evidence. This can include anything from service user data to testimony from an organisation's members to existing government or academic evidence. Even a small amount of evidence will strengthen a response.
- **Follow the instructions.** Following the basic instructions about what format the response should be in, how to submit the response and the response deadline will again mean you are more likely to be listened to. You should request notification that your response has been received and that you be kept informed of the subsequent process for developing the policy, including when final policy decisions will be made.

We have previously responded to council consultations, for example on changes to voluntary sector guidance on safeguarding children. We do this by listening to the views and experiences of our members and we are keen to do this more; we have the capacity to

respond to consultations which many smaller organisations do not. Contact our policy team to discuss any consultations you would like us to respond to (see Appendix 1).

You can also find open consultations, as well as make complaints and give feedback, on the council's [Say It](#) web pages. This is an easy way to comment on a particular area of policy; the listed options take you through to more detailed pages on themes including housing, health and community services, children's services and regeneration. In each of these areas you can respond to consultation surveys on particular issues (e.g. parents and carers, satisfaction with council housing).

You can also express strong opinions about council services via the [Complaints and feedback](#) section of the 'Say It' web pages. Here you can write a short complaint, compliment or other comment about council-provided services. The council will aim to investigate and resolve complaints within 15 days. While this is not a policymaking forum, it is an important way of highlighting concerns about services and the council is obliged to respond to complains.

3.4 Petitions

A **petition** is short statement about a local issue, requesting that the council take a specific action. [Petitions](#) can either request a debate to be held on a topic at a council assembly, cabinet or community council meeting or request that a specific council officer be held to account. For a petition to be successful it must be supported by a number of signatures of people living, working or studying in Southwark. See Table 1 for more detail.

Table 1. Number of petition signatures needed to force a debate:

Petition type	Number of signatures required
Debate at Council Assembly	1500
Debate at Cabinet	500
Debate at Community Council (local issues)	250
Hold an officer to account at Overview & Scrutiny Committee, or a sub-committee.	500

Petitions must relate specifically to Southwark and address matters over which the council has power or duties. They may concern the social, economic or environmental wellbeing of Southwark where the council has no *direct* control but where the council may be able to make representations to a *partner* organisation, such as a hospital. Petitions may not relate to planning or licencing applications. Previous petition issues include local parking for shoppers and business owners. Petitions must include a named organiser for the council to communicate with.

Petition requests should be sent by post to the council to: The Proper Constitutional Officer, Constitutional Team, London Borough of Southwark, PO Box 64529, London SE1P 5LX. Contact the council's Constitutional Manager on 020 7525 7225 or Constitutional.Team@southwark.gov.uk.

If successful, the petition organiser will be given five minutes to present the petition at the next meeting. Alternatively, they may request a councillor to present the petition on their behalf. The issue will then be discussed by councillors for a maximum of fifteen minutes. Councillors will then decide what action to take, which may include:

- Taking the action requested in the petition.
- Not taking the action requested, for reasons put forward in the debate.
- Investigating the matter further, such as through a relevant committee.

Other possible actions include holding an inquiry, undertaking research, holding a public meeting, meeting petitioners.

You can create an [e-petition](#) on the council website, which others are then free to sign. The names of people who sign will be publicly available online, but their contact details will not. It is the responsibility of the petition organiser to promote the petition and encourage people to sign it. E-petitions follow the same process as paper petitions, above, and are overseen by the council's [constitutional team](#).

Read the council's in-depth guidance on petitions and e-petitions [here](#).

3.5 Influencing council budget-setting

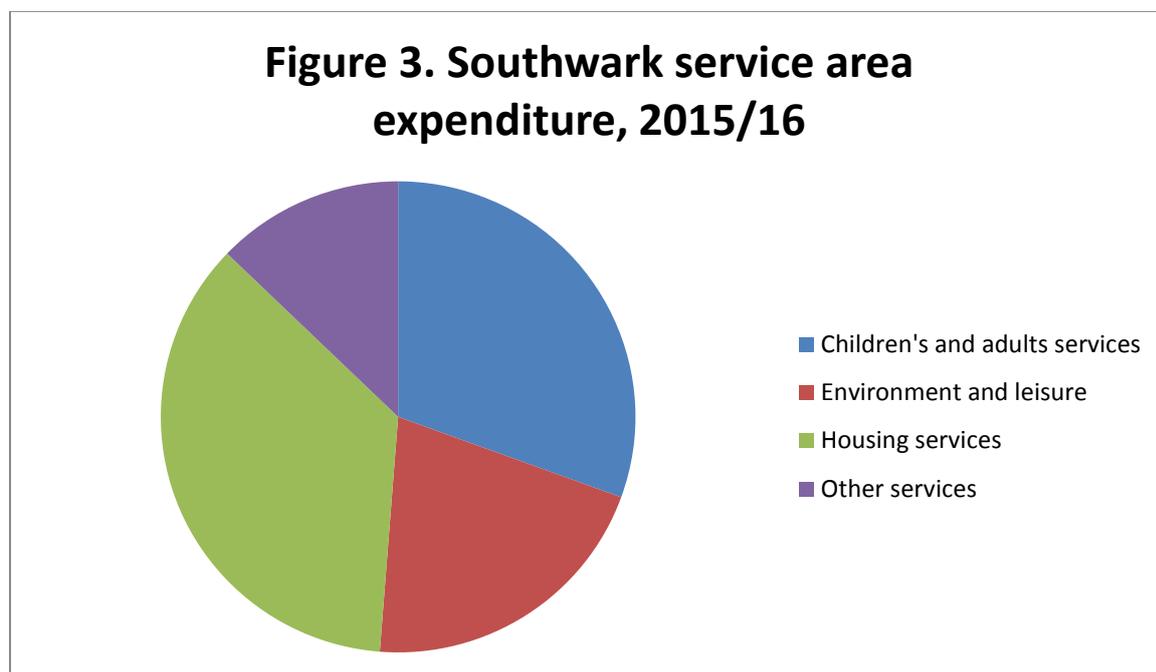
Every year the council sets an **annual budget** for the upcoming financial year (April-March). This budget includes the amount to be spent on delivering essential public services, many of which are delivered by the voluntary and community sector. Southwark's overall budget is made up of multiple elements including the annual '**finance settlement**' grant from central government and income from council tax. Table 2 shows the reductions in Southwark's spending power following the government's changes to the finance settlement. The key point is that the council now has less budget to spend on delivering services, and this will impact the VCS.

Council spending power 2011/12 – 2015/16:

		Southwark	Inner London	London	England
2011/12	£m	33.7	303.3	514.8	2,578.50
	%	8.4	7.8	5.9	4.7
2012/13	£m	16.9	175.1	325.3	1,742.90
	%	4.6	4.9	4.0	3.3
2013/14	£m	21.4	206.4	398.7	1,966.80
	%	5.9	5.9	4.9	3.8
2014/15	£m	17.7	179.2	327.2	1,665.5
	%	4.8	4.8	3.9	3.1
2015/16	£m	18.8	181.6	268.2	1,056.4
	%	5.3	4.9	3.3	2.0

For 2015/16, Southwark has a [budget](#) of **£323 million** to spend on **services**.

Figure 3 shows expenditure by service area. It shows that adult services and children’s services make up the biggest proportion of what the council spends. The voluntary and community sector provides services to vulnerable children, young people, adults and older people, including those with disabilities and care needs. So, as these budgets are threatened with further reductions, the sector may want to influence the council as it sets the budget.



Here is a rough timeline for how the **2016/17 budget** will be set:

- 1) Autumn 2015 – Council produces draft 2016/17 budget in **consultation with stakeholders**, including the VCS
- 2) Nov/Dec 2015 – Central government announces **financial settlement** for 2016/17

- 3) Jan 2016 – Cabinet finalises **detailed 2016/17 budget**
- 4) Jan/Feb 2016 – Council assembly agree **final budget** for 2016/17

In the past, VCS providers could, in principle, influence the budget-setting process by responding to the council's budget consultation. From August – October 2014, Southwark Council invited residents to [have their say](#) on the 2014/15 budget.

This year, CAS will lead a collective voice to influence the setting of the 2016/17 budget during the autumn. We will argue that the voluntary and community sector is uniquely placed to meet the needs of many vulnerable and disadvantaged people and that the council should bear this in mind when finalising its reduced budget. We encourage all VCS organisations to join with us in this – see Appendix 1 for contact details.

3.6 Using the Localism Act & Sustainable Communities Act

The Localism Act 2011 introduced measures to shift power away from central government towards communities (and local authorities), giving them more power and control over their local areas. These new rights provide opportunities for the local VCS to influence policy and planning decisions. They include the following:

- **Community right to bid (assets of community value).** Local authorities are now required to maintain a list of assets of 'community value' – libraries, swimming pools, markets, pubs – as nominated by the local community. When these listed assets come up for sale or a change of ownership, the Localism Act means that community groups must be given time to raise money and develop a bid for the asset. The [Ivy House pub](#) in Southwark is an interesting example of a building that has been successfully listed as an asset of community value.
- **Community right to challenge.** The Localism Act gives voluntary and community groups (as well as parish councils and local authority employees) who want to run a public service the right to express an interest in taking over the running of that service from the local authority. The local authority must respond to this challenge and, where it accepts the challenge, run a procurement exercise in which the challenging organisation can bid. This will foster innovation in the delivery of public services.
- **Neighbourhood planning.** The Act also introduces a right for communities to draw up a neighbourhood plan, giving them more influence over their local areas. This allows residents, businesses and employees to say where they think new houses, businesses and shops will go and how they should look.
- **Community right to build.** As part of neighbourhood planning, local people can form a community organisation to bring forward development proposals, i.e. building new homes, businesses, shops, playgrounds etc. Provided the plans meet minimum criteria and have local support they will be approved without needing to go through traditional planning applications and the benefits of such developments will stay within the community.

Read more about the Localism Act in the government's [plain English guide](#).

Under the **Sustainable Communities Act** individuals and community groups can partner with the council to make proposals to central government on how to improve their local community. Proposals tend to be around supporting local shops, pubs, businesses and post offices, as well as improving green space and supporting local energy production. [The Act](#) means councils must reach agreement with communities about which proposals to put forward and that central government must consider these.

This is potentially an excellent mechanism for community groups to achieve improvements in their community.

3.7 Local councillors and Southwark Youth Council

The most direct link between Southwark residents and the council is through **locally-elected councillors**. As noted above, there are [63 councillors](#), three from each ward in the borough. Residents can meet councillors at their ward surgeries to discuss local issues of concern.

Action: See the full list of councillors arranged by name, ward and political party on the [council website](#). You can also see each councillor's position in the cabinet or on particular committees and their contact details.

Knowing councillors' political party and area of responsibility – e.g. health and social care policy, or chairing a particular community council – can help organisations and citizens identify who to communicate with about a particular policy issue. Council assembly meetings now include a time for mixing between residents and councillors; this may be an opportunity for people to meet councillors with oversight of a particular policy area. [Write To Them](#) is a useful website helping people identify their councillor (by postcode) and send them messages and requests.

It may also be worth communicating concerns and ideas to local branches of the **political parties** making up the council as this is often where policy ideas are formulated and discussed. At the time of writing the [Labour](#) group form the majority in the council assembly and so may be particularly worth influencing. However, the [Liberal Democrats](#) make up a sizeable minority and so are also influential. The [Conservative](#) party has a small presence in the borough and no clear local branch.

Southwark Youth Council (SYC) is run by and for young people aged 13-19 living, studying and working in the borough to influence the design of public services and how neighbourhoods should be improved. SYC runs workshops and events for young people to express their views and then takes those views to local decision-makers. It consists of five Youth Community Councils (YCC), representing five local areas:

- Bermondsey & Rotherhithe
- Camberwell
- Borough, Bankside & Walworth
- Dulwich & Peckham
- Peckham Rye & Nunhead

Representatives from each YCC come together at the Southwark Youth Council to discuss borough-wide issues. SYC's website, [Whatever](#), includes details of opportunities for young people to get involved and contact details.

4. Influencing policy through CAS and the VCS

So far we have described the formal council channels for how organisations and citizens can influence policy. A very different way of influencing policy is through the long-standing relationships between the council and voluntary sector organisations. This chapter outlines how organisations can influence policy through relationships, strategic partnerships and intermediaries such as CAS.

4.1 CAS representation on council strategic partnerships

One of CAS's aims is to give the voluntary and community sector in Southwark a strong voice in discussions with the council and other policymakers. We have a system of [elected representatives](#) (or 'Reps') who sit on a range of council-led **strategic partnerships and forums**.

These partnerships set strategic policy for areas such as housing, safeguarding children and adults, people with learning disabilities, mental health services and older people. They consist of the council and other local agencies, such as the police and NHS, as well as the voluntary sector. See the full list of strategic partnerships and forums in Table 3 (please note this is subject to change as partnerships come to an end or start up).

A key responsibility of the Reps is to speak on behalf of the local voluntary and community sector *as a whole*, rather than for themselves or their own organisations. Their main duties are to:

- **Listen** to the concerns, needs and strengths of the sector, through attending CAS' quarterly forums and other meetings.
- **Communicate** these to the council and other policymakers by sitting on strategic partnerships.
- **Inform** the sector fully of key policy developments, consultations and funding threats or opportunities

Table 3. List of strategic partnerships and forums

Adult Health & Social Care	Children, Young People & Families	Housing, Communities & Disabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health & Wellbeing Board • Older People’s Partnership Board • Safeguarding Adults Partnership Board • NHS Mental Health Programme Management Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Families Trust • Corporate Parenting Committee • Safeguarding Children Partnership Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safer Southwark Partnership • Learning Disability Partnership Board

Staff and trustees of CAS member organisations can nominate themselves to be a Rep and therefore have a direct influence on policy by contributing to these partnerships. In particular, Reps ensure that policy recognises the value of the local voluntary and community sector and gives voluntary organisations a fair opportunity to deliver high-quality services to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

This system of Reps enables the **wider sector to influence policy** by communicating the experiences, concerns and suggestions emerging from their work to Reps, who then express these to policymakers in partnership meetings. This happens through CAS’ quarterly **forums**, which bring together 20-30 people to discuss the latest policy developments. There are two forums:

- [Children, Young People & Families forum](#)
- [Adults Health & Social Care forum](#)

CAS also hosts the [Council-VCS Liaison Group](#), which develops and improves the relationship between the VCS and the council. VCS Reps attend this group to represent the sector and raise important issues.

Action: We encourage CAS members and the wider sector to maintain an **open dialogue with us about policy issues affecting them**.

This could include existing council policies that are failing vulnerable and disadvantaged people, or forthcoming policies under consultation. Specific issues include changes to the delivery of services with older people, young people or those with mental health problems. They may be threats to existing funding or indeed new opportunities for organisations to bid for service delivery contracts, or new council strategies or priorities in health, for example.

Get in touch at any time with the CAS policy team (see Appendix 1 for contact details).

4.2 Health and social care

Health services in the borough are commissioned by the local **Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)**. To inform commissioning and set health priorities, Southwark has a **Health &**

Wellbeing Board made up of council officers, GPs, local health providers and the police. CAS is a member of the board, meaning we attend meetings and represent the local voluntary and community sector. Voluntary organisations wanting to influence health and social care policy, perhaps based on the needs of their service users, should therefore communicate their key points to CAS, who can then feed these to the Health & Wellbeing Board.

Healthwatch England is the [consumer champion](#) for users of health and social care services. The local branch – **Healthwatch Southwark** – listens to people’s experience of services and influence policymakers to improve services accordingly. Importantly, Healthwatch Southwark has a seat on the local Health & Wellbeing board, enabling it to influence how services are designed and commissioned. Healthwatch also:

- Has the power to enter and view services
- Produces reports which influence the way services are designed and delivered
- Provides information, advice and support on local services
- Passes information and recommendations to Healthwatch England and the Care Quality Commission

Healthwatch in Southwark is part of CAS, and the Healthwatch team are based in the CAS offices.

4.3 CAB and other forums

There are other voluntary and community sector bodies that organisations and citizens should be aware of and consider building relationships with in order to amplify their policy influence. One is the **Citizens’ Advice Bureau (CAB)**, which has a strong policy influencing voice with the council based on its work giving advice to people on a range of legal, money and other problems. Those working with service users experiencing problems including debt, housing, welfare benefits or immigration could contribute to CAB’s high profile policy influencing work by communicating their concerns based on evidence of their users’ experience. Read about the work of [Southwark CAB](#) and how to contact them.

The **Southwark Police and Community Consultative Group (SPCCG)** gives voluntary organisations the opportunity to come together with residents, community groups, faith groups, senior police officers, local councillors and others to influence policing policy and practice.

There are a host of **other voluntary forums and groups** with links to the council and other agencies that citizens and organisations may find are a good route for communicating their key concerns to policymakers. In particular there is a well-developed network of associations and forums for tenants and residents to communicate key issues to the council. **Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs)** are made up of people living in a particular building, estate or area. They represent the needs and rights of tenants and residents to the council, which formally recognises such groups. Each TRA elects a representative to the local Area Housing Forum ([AHF](#)), which is consulted by the council on housing and community issues. Marginalised groups (e.g. people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups) contribute

to AHFs. Each AHF sends two representatives to the borough-wide [Tenant Council](#), which acts as the main link between residents and the council, with elected councillors attending but not voting. The Southwark Group of Tenant's Organisations ([SGTO](#)) is a voluntary organisation representing and promoting the rights of tenants and residents.

There are a number of independent **community forums** where residents come together, often with council and voluntary sector representatives, to discuss local concerns and sometimes to lobby government. [These forums](#), listed below, often focus on a particular disadvantaged group.

- Bengali Community Development Project ([BCDP](#))
- Southwark LGBT [Forum and Network](#), supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.
- Southwark Black Parents [Forum](#)
- Southwark Disability Forum ([SDF](#))
- Southwark Multi Faith [Forum](#)
- Southwark Pensioners [Forum](#)

5. Central and regional government, London Citizens, local media

While this paper is intended to give readers an overview of how to influence Southwark council in particular, it is also important to mention other levels of policymaking and how these can be influenced.

5.1 Central government

So far we have not said anything about influencing policy at the level of **central government**, i.e. parliament and central government departments. Parliament passes laws and makes policy decisions directly affecting local authorities, such as the total grant it gives local authorities over a two-year period ([the local government finance settlement](#)). This directly affects the level and kind of public services the council can deliver or fund the voluntary sector to deliver. Parliament also signs into law new strategies for delivering public services.

This paper does not give detailed guidance on how to influence policymaking in central government. We do want to point to some of the guides available elsewhere, such as those by the [Economic and Social Research Council](#) and the [Lesbian & Gay Foundation](#). Box 4 summarises some key steps in influencing central government.

Box 4. Summary of key steps in influencing central government policy

- Monitoring parliamentary developments, such as seeing what Bills are going through parliament, via the [parliament website](#).
- Monitoring [open consultations](#) and newly published government research and proposals.
- Influencing [elected politicians](#) – MPs and peers – in the House of Commons and House of Lords, who may in turn alter Bills in parliament. [TheyWorkForYou](#) is a website enabling people to find out who their MP is and to see what MPs and peers are saying in parliamentary debates and how they vote on different policies.
- Influencing political parties, such as the [Conservatives](#), [Labour](#) or [Liberal Democrats](#), where policy is often formulated.
- Influencing central government by communicating with ministers and civil servants in [central government departments](#), such as the Department for Communities and Local Government or the Department for Work and Pensions.

A further level of policymaking is the European parliament, although this may be less relevant to voluntary organisations in Southwark. Policy at this level can be influenced via your local Member of the European Parliament ([MEP](#)). There are [eight MEPs](#) representing London.

5.2 National voluntary sector organisations and think-tanks

Small voluntary sector organisations – unlike many larger ones – often do not have the resources to influence central government directly, their capacity generally spent providing services and running their organisations. Such organisations can bring their policy concerns and suggestions to larger infrastructure organisations, such as the **National Council for Voluntary Organisations** ([NCVO](#)). NCVO supports over 8,500 VCS organisations of all sectors and sizes, representing the needs and interests of the sector to the government through its strong network of policymakers.

Action: If you want to influence central government policy but have limited capacity, contact NCVO's [policy and research](#) team to see whether they may be able to support you.

A similar indirect way of influencing central government policy is through **think-tanks**, which are organisations that develop policy ideas that political parties directly draw on. They have a strong research focus, often drawing on public service delivery best practice at the local level, including that of voluntary sector providers. Some are very influential, with close links to the main parties. They often focus on particular policy areas, such as health (the [King's Fund](#)), education (the [Education Foundation](#)) or employment (the [Work Foundation](#)). The [Young Foundation](#), [Demos](#), [ippr](#), the [New Local Government Network](#) and the [Centre for Social Justice](#) may also be of particular interest to voluntary organisations. See a list of think-tanks and descriptions on the Guardian [website](#).

5.3 Regional, London Citizens and local media

Briefly, there are also **regional** policymaking bodies and organisations supporting the voluntary sector. In London, the **Greater London Authority (GLA)** – consisting of the elected Mayor of London, the London Assembly of 25 elected members and support staff – has powers in the following policy areas:

- Economic development and regeneration
- Housing
- Environment
- Health
- Policing
- Fire and emergency planning
- Transport
- Planning and development
- Culture

See [London Elects](#) for a useful outline of the GLA's powers and responsibilities in these areas. The GLA works closely with Transport for London (TfL), the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (replacing the Metropolitan Police Authority).

The GLA consults the public on its policies and decisions – find out what it is consulting on and contribute your opinions on the GLA [website](#). Previous consultations have been on social housing tenants, area planning frameworks, health inequalities and young people.

The 25 elected Assembly Members include 11 London-wide members and 14 constituency members. The last election was in 2012 (the next will be in 2016) when there were 12 Labour candidates, nine Conservatives, two Liberal Democrats and two Green Party candidates elected. The current member for Lambeth and Southwark is [Val Shawcross](#) of the Labour party. Organisations and citizens in Southwark can try and influence London Assembly policy by contacting her via her [website](#). See [London Elects](#) for a full list of Assembly Members.

As discussed above, voluntary organisations in Southwark may be better able to influence London policymakers by working with larger infrastructure bodies that support the voluntary sector, such as NCVO. More locally, the **London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC)** brings together voluntary and community sector organisations in London 'to create a co-ordinated voice to influence policymakers on issues affecting Londoners.'¹ Again, organisations in Southwark with strong views on policy changes may consider building a relationship with LVSC in order to communicate these views, ideally supported by evidence, with a view to having greater policy influence impact.

South London Citizens (SLC) is an alliance of community organisations in Southwark, Croydon, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Wandsworth campaigning for social, economic and environmental justice for local people. Members include schools, colleges, churches, Islamic centres and community groups. It is part of [Citizens UK](#), the 'national home of community organising.' Campaign issues include introducing a living wage, London

¹<http://www.lvsc.org.uk/about-lvsc.aspx>

Olympics 2012 jobs for local people and community safety for young people. Citizens UK is well-known and influential among policymakers so voluntary organisations may consider building a relationship with SLC to amplify their policy voice.

Finally, organisations and citizens wanting to influence the council may make their voice stronger and put pressure on policymakers by communicating key requests and messages through **local media**. This raises awareness of issues among the local community who may add their support, for example by drawing attention to petitions on issues such as [road safety](#). [Southwark News](#) (newspaper and online) and the [London SE1](#) community website are two widely-read media outputs in the borough.

6. Policymaker perspective and effective influencing

This guide has outlined specific ways of influencing policy, particularly at the local level. This final chapter very briefly highlights some general considerations for organisations and citizens who want to be effective at influencing policy. This includes seeing things from the perspective of policymakers, for example by understanding the environment they make decisions in, as well as a list of more general tips for effective influencing.

6.1 The policymaker's perspective: trends and drivers

The environment in which council officers and other policymakers make policy decisions and fund public services has changed significantly in recent times. Understanding the context policymakers work in and the pressures they face, and factoring this into policy influencing messages, increases the chances of having a real impact on policymaking. Box 5, below, contains a list of recent trends in how councils manage public services, as well as wider economic and social drivers shaping the actions and decisions policymakers can take.

Box 5. Trends and drivers affecting policymaking

- Shrinking **council budgets**, resulting from central government spending cuts. Added to the UK's **ageing population** and rising pressure on health and social care budgets, this has led to a drive towards **efficiency** in the commissioning of services from the voluntary and community sector.
- Use of **partnerships** with the voluntary and community sector (and others) to design and deliver services.
- The shift away from awarding **grants** towards **contracts** for the delivery of services. This has led to a **bidding culture**, where public, private and voluntary and community sector agencies compete against each other to deliver services.
- A focus on service user **outcomes** (impacts) over outputs (activities).
- A public desire for better **quality** public services, and an emphasis on service user **choice** in a market of increasingly **personalised** services.
- Formal but voluntary agreements or '**compacts**' between the government and the voluntary and community sector, outlining a way of working together to mutual advantage (read the [Southwark compact](#)).
- Increased **localism**, in which communities have more control over their local area and how services are delivered.

Final word

Hopefully this guide gives a useful summary of how the voluntary and community sector in Southwark can use its experience working with disadvantaged and vulnerable people to improve policymaking at the council and beyond. We would encourage all organisations that their voice is important and valid and that policymaking benefits from their input, no matter how small it may seem.

In particular, we want people to put themselves forward to be a representative for the whole voluntary and community sector in Southwark, contributing to the development of local policies in council-led strategic partnerships and forums.

At the same time, CAS is here to support those who want to have a stronger voice. Please do get in touch with us to discuss how you would like to influence policy and to see how we can join and support you.

Box 6. General tips for effective influencing

- **Have a clear message.** Be very clear about what it is you want to see happen (or not happen). If you can't summarise your 'ask' in 30 seconds, using plain English, then your message is not clear enough.
- **Rationale.** Be clear why you are making your request. Is it to benefit service users, a particular disadvantaged group or residents of an area and if so, how?
- **Working together.** If you can provide a solution to a problem faced by policymakers it will more likely be listened to and acted on. Policymakers are often working towards similar goals (under constrained budgets) and so should not be seen as 'the enemy'. Use good listening skills to find out policymakers' aims and the barriers they face and find where your aims match.
- **Relationships.** It can be useful to build relationships with a wide range of stakeholders – local councillors, council officers, heads of council departments, commissioners, MPs, other voluntary organisations. Tailor your message to different stakeholders and know what they want from you and the kind of message they will respond to.
- **Evidence.** Evidence and research is central to policymaking so policymakers are much more likely to listen when presented with some kind of evidence to support your point. This evidence can be many things, including service user data, data on public needs (e.g. the [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#)) or demographic information on the changing [local population](#).

Appendix 1: Key contacts

CAS policy team

Rachel Clarkson, Senior Policy Officer, rachel@casouthwark.org.uk, 020 7358 7017

Southwark Council constitutional team

Constitutional team, PO Box 64529, London, SE1P 5LX,
constitutional.team@southwark.gov.uk, 020 7525 7225

Appendix 2: Useful links and resources

Council meeting calendar

Southwark council calendar of council assembly, cabinet, committee and community council meetings:

<http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/mgCalendarMonthView.aspx?GL=1&bcr=1>

Council committee structure:

Overview of council assembly, cabinet, overview & scrutiny, committees, sub-committees and community councils, including agendas, minutes, members, attendance and news feeds: <http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>

Council meeting agendas and minutes

For all recent and forthcoming council assembly, cabinet, committee and community council meetings:

<http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1>

Council assembly:

<http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=132>

Council cabinet:

http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200038/councillors_mps_and_meps/1630/cabinet_members_and_portfolios

Community councils:

http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/1012/council_tenant_involvement/2572/community_councils

Leader of the Council: <http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/mgUserInfo.aspx?UID=189>

List of councillors: <http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1>

Council departments:

http://www.southwark.gov.uk/downloads/download/2133/information_on_council_departments

Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team:

http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/10058/about_southwark_council/1639/chief_executive

Asking questions at council meetings:

https://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/10058/about_southwark_council/353/ask_a_question

Petitions: <http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200024/consultations/1703/petitions/1>

Council consultations: <http://www.southwark.gov.uk/consultations>

Notification of council decisions:

<http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/mgDelegatedDecisions.aspx?DS=0&bcr=1>

Council constitution:

http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/10058/about_southwark_council/375/councils_constitution

UK Parliament: <http://www.parliament.uk/>

GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/>

NCVO: <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/>

LVSC: <http://www.lvsc.org.uk/>

CAS system of VSC representation (Reps): <http://casouthwark.org.uk/about-us/meet-our-team/representatives>

Openly Local: Making government more transparent

This website provides an up-to-date picture of all forthcoming and recent council meetings, including minutes, agendas and councillor attendance: <http://openlylocal.com/councils/15-London-Borough-of-Southwark>

Appendix 3: Southwark strategic partnerships and forums links

Children and Families Trust

http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200165/southwarks_children_and_families_trust

Safer Southwark Partnership

http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200030/community_safety_and_enforcement/434/safer_southwark_partnership/1

Safeguarding Children Board

http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/266/child_protection/2466/southwark_safeguarding_children_board

Safeguarding Adults Partnership Board

http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/731/keeping_safe_and_reporting_abuse/676/safeguarding_adults_board/1

Corporate Parenting Committee

<http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=129>

Mental Health Programme Management Group

<http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s12754/NHS%20Southwark%20System-wide%20sustainability%20report.pdf> (p.5)