Community Engagement Strategy Consultation
Online and face-to-face survey results

Methodology

Two slightly different consultation questionnaires were used to ask the public about the framework of the Community Engagement Strategy:

1. **Online survey:** this questionnaire was available online through Survey Monkey between 10th July and 5th September 2017, though hard copies of this survey were available upon request. A total of 252 started the survey, though there was a relatively high drop-off rate, with sample sizes for individual questions being considerably lower than this.

2. **Face-to-face survey:** this questionnaire was an abridged version of the online questionnaire and was used to engage people at various locations in the borough such as the IDEA Store at Watney Market, the Shadwell Centre (IDEA Store), the East London mosque, the Maryam Centre, Tarling Community Centre, other open space and community events in the borough. A total of 163 people completed this survey.

Respondent profile

Online survey:

- **Connection to Tower Hamlets:** The majority of respondents (64%) were Tower Hamlets residents, 18% worked in Tower Hamlets, 10% were council officers, 6% were responding on behalf of an organisation and 2% were connected to Tower Hamlets in some other way (for example a student, an elected member, or a combination of the other categories).

- **Gender:** 53% of respondents were female, 38% were male, and 9% preferred not to say or identified their gender in a different way.

- **Age:** Younger people under 35 were under-represented, making up 25% of respondents but 52% of the adult population[1]. On the other hand, older adults 45 or older made up 57% of survey respondents but 27% of the adult population.

- **Disability:** 14% of respondents said that their day-to-day activities were limited because of a health problem or disability. This is broadly representative of the borough population.[2]

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[1] Compared with ONS 2016 Mid-year Estimates.
[2] In the 2011 Census, 16% of adult residents reported that their day-to-day activities were limited 'a little' or 'a lot' – see table LC3101EW.

- **Ethnicity:** White British residents were over-represented in the consultation, making up 52% of respondents but 35% of the borough's 16+ population.[3] Bangladeshi and other BME residents were under-represented. 5% of consultation respondents were Bangladeshi compared with 26% of the borough population.

- It should be noted that the majority of these questions were at the end of the survey, so those who abandoned the survey will not have completed these questions. 122 out of 252 respondents completed the demographic questions.

Face-to-face survey:

- **Connection to Tower Hamlets:** 70% of respondents were residents, 15% worked in the borough, 9% were students, and the remaining 6% were connected to the borough in some other way (e.g. business owner, council staff, or on behalf of an organisation).

- **Gender:** 55% of respondents were female and 45% were male.

- **Age:** Survey respondents were broadly representative of the borough population. For example, 46% of respondents were aged under 35 compared with 52% of the adult population.

- **Disability:** 16% of respondents said that their day-to-day activities were limited by a long-term health problem or disability. This is the same proportion as the borough population in the 2011 Census.

- **Ethnicity:** Survey respondents were broadly representative of the borough population. 29% of respondents were White British compared with 35% of the borough's 16+ population. 33% of respondents were Bangladeshi compared with 26% of the population. 37% of respondents belonged to other minority ethnic groups (i.e. not White British or Bangladeshi) compared with 39% of the population.

Social Media

The Communications Team carried out regular Tweets, Facebook posts and posted 12 videos on our You Tube channel.to publicise the consultation.

- 12 videos posted on our YouTube channel with 222 views.

- Tweets reached a total of 15,602 with 168 engagements.

- Facebook posts reached 1,607 people with 60 engagements.

- LinkedIn posts reached 12,154 people with 51 engagements.
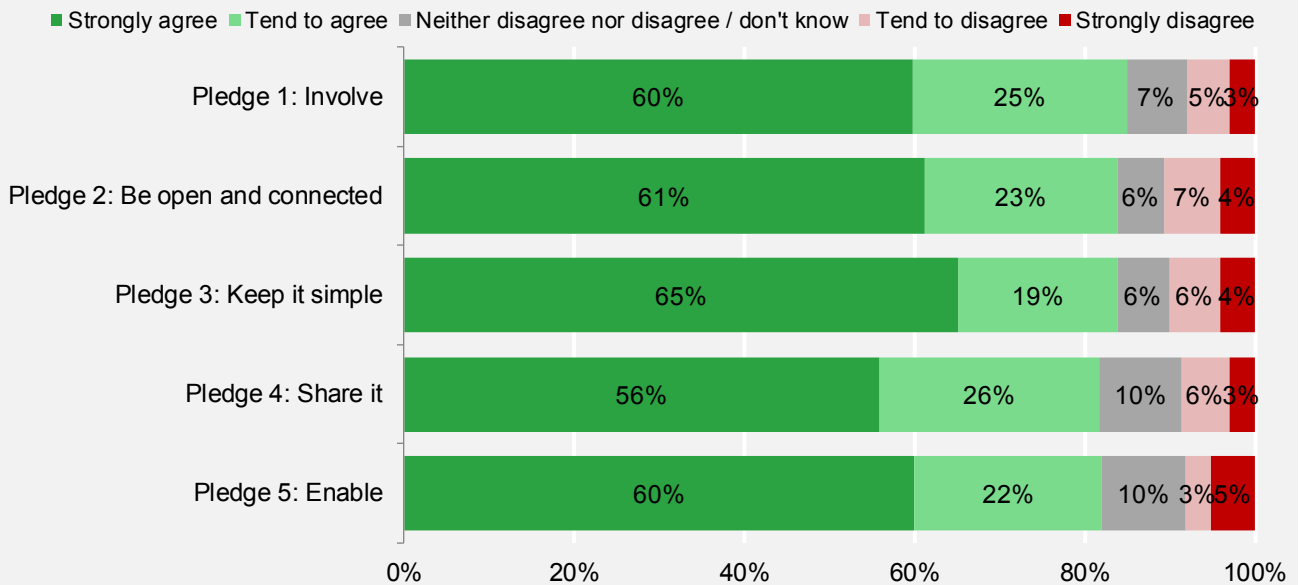
- Vox Pops – 222 views

Community advertising

Copies of the pledge cards were distributed at IDEA Stores and other community centres to publicise the consultation and encourage to complete the online survey.

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[3] Compared with the 2011 Census – see Table LC2109EW.
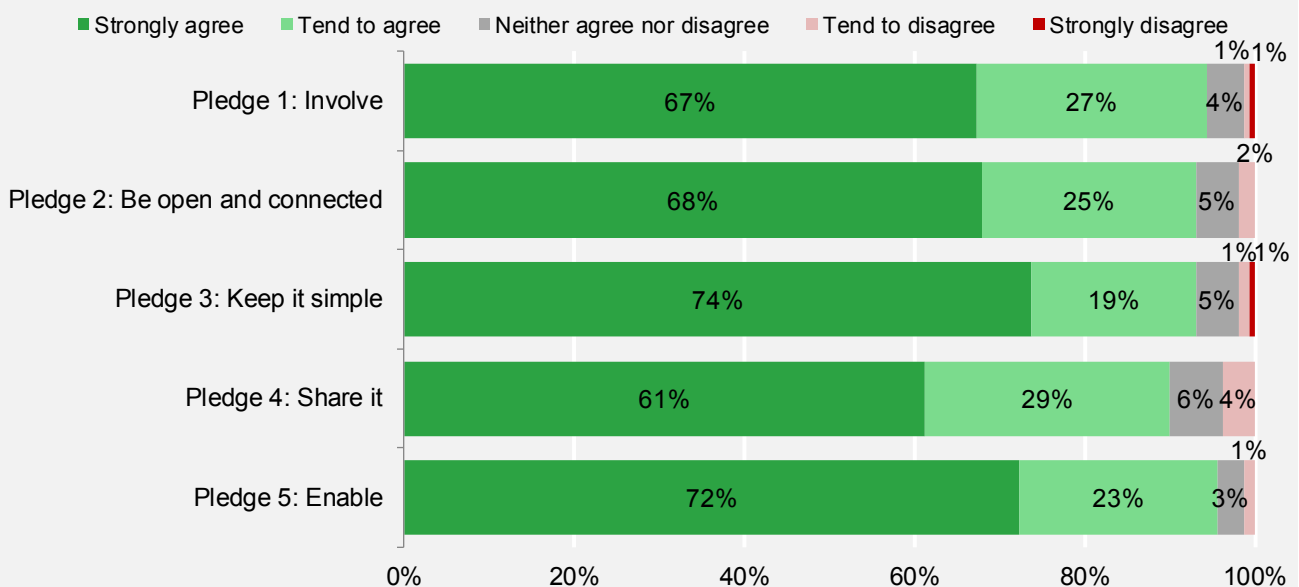
The five pledges

Respondents to both the online and face-to-face questionnaires were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the five pledges set out in the Community Engagement Framework. The responses to these pledges were very positive in both the online and face-to-face surveys, with a majority of respondents strongly agreeing with the pledges.

Online Survey Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with these commitments?

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Tend to agree ■ Neither disagree nor disagree / don't know ■ Tend to disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Pledge	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Pledge 1: Involve	60%	25%	7%	5%	3%
Pledge 2: Be open and connected	61%	23%	6%	7%	4%
Pledge 3: Keep it simple	65%	19%	6%	6%	4%
Pledge 4: Share it	56%	26%	10%	6%	3%
Pledge 5: Enable	60%	22%	10%	3%	5%

Source: Community Engagement Strategy online survey. Minimum sample size = 195

Face-to-face Survey Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with these commitments?

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Tend to agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Tend to disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Pledge	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Pledge 1: Involve	67%	27%	4%	1%	1%
Pledge 2: Be open and connected	68%	25%	5%	2%	
Pledge 3: Keep it simple	74%	19%	5%	1%	1%
Pledge 4: Share it	61%	29%	6%	4%	
Pledge 5: Enable	72%	23%	3%	1%	

Source: Community Engagement Strategy face-to-face abridged survey. Minimum sample size = 159

In addition, respondents were asked to provide free-text comments explaining why they agree or disagree with the commitments. Many respondents felt that these pledges were good, 'common sense' ideas. However some raised constructive points that the council should keep in mind:
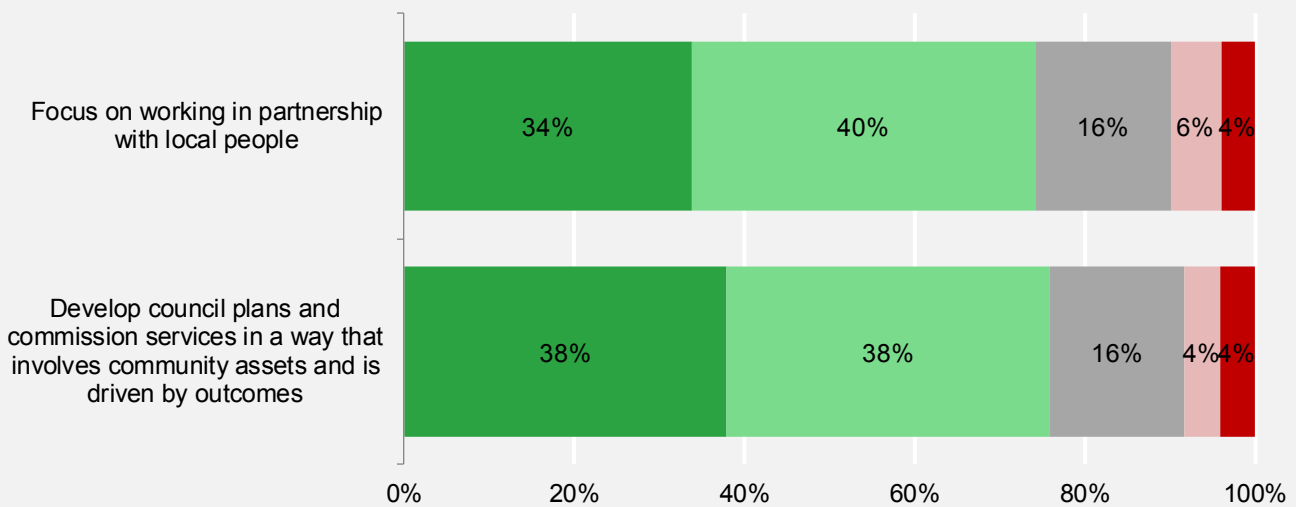
- The council must get real representation from all communities, not just the 'loudest voices' or the 'usual suspects' who are already active in the community. One respondent said: "Community consultation inherently demands that people hear about the meetings, that they are held at times and places which are accessible to people who have the time, skills and confidence to join in which…[tend to be] white middle class residents." Effort must be made to involve residents who are disengaged or who lead already busy lives.

- Engagement should not be tokenistic. Questionnaires should be designed to be open (not just agreeing with a decision that has been made), results should be published, action should be taken, and the people who have taken part should be kept up to date with what has happened as a result of their involvement. If this does not happen, residents will lose interest and motivation to get involved.

- Some groups will struggle to engage through digital technology. The council will have to ensure that they are not excluding residents by using digital channels for engagement.

- Some people prefer involvement through personal networking and relationships rather than 'programmes of involvement'.

- The balance of power in the commitments is still focused on the council. For example, instead of Pledge 5 focussing on council staff, it might read: 'We will all be supported by high quality training and tools to design programmes of involvement which are effective, meaningful and inclusive.'

- National policy may mean that the council does not have the power to enact the change residents want. There need to be clear, realistic expectations on what can and cannot be achieved through engagement.

- In order for these commitments to come to fruition, the council will have to put effort and resources into achieving them.

- Engagement is not only about specific involvement activities, but also about how residents engage with local services.

Pledge 1: Involve

Respondents to the online consultation were asked to comment on specific actions identified in the Community Engagement Strategy that will enable the council to achieve Pledge 1 (Involve). Two broad categories of action were given (see chart below) with more specific actions detailed in addition to these. The chart shows that the majority of respondents agreed with the actions identified in the framework.

Online Survey Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree that this action will help us to achieve Pledge 1?

■ Strongly agree ■ Tend to agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree / Don't know ■ Tend to disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Action	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree / Don't know	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Focus on working in partnership with local people	34%	40%	16%	6%	4%
Develop council plans and commission services in a way that involves community assets and is driven by outcomes	38%	38%	16%	4%	4%

Source: Community Engagement Strategy online survey. Minimum sample size = 145

In addition, respondents were able to provide free-text responses to these actions. Some key points that emerged from the actions on **focusing on working in partnership with local people** were:
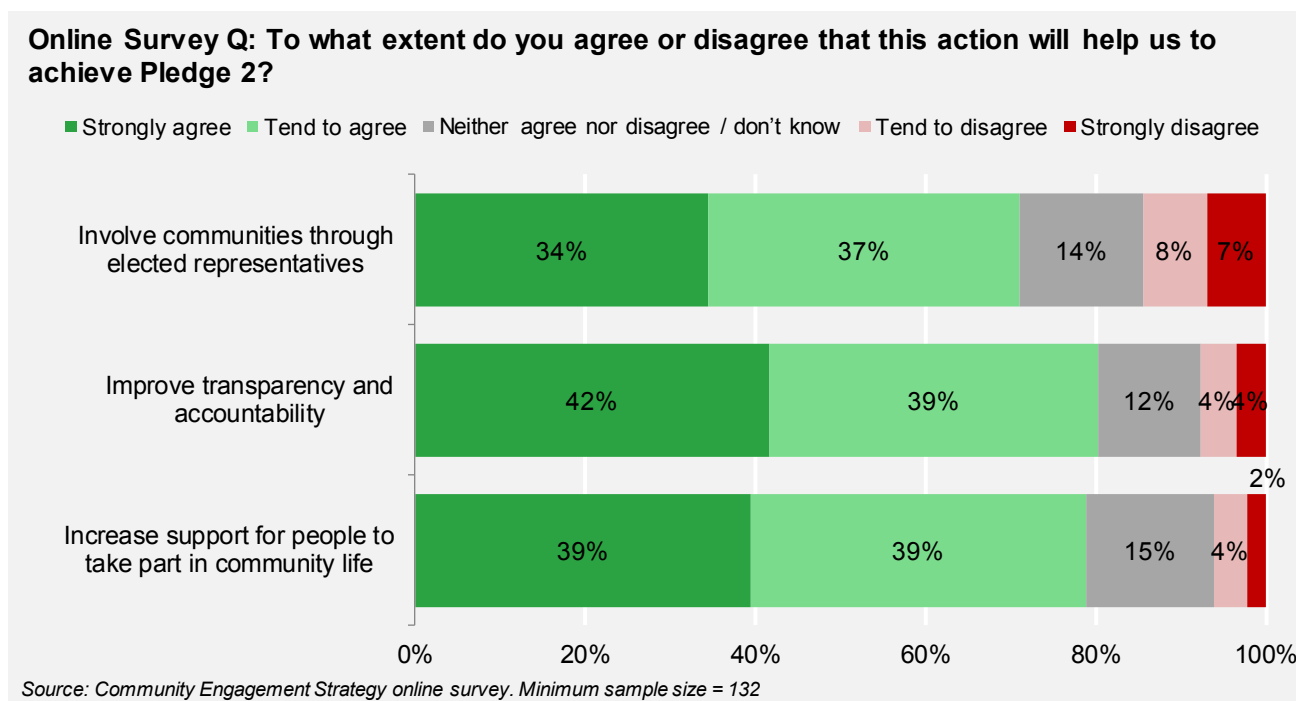
- The council must be transparent about the parameters of co-production and the constraints of local government. Expectations on all sides must be realistic on what can and cannot be achieved.

- The council must get real representation from all communities, not just the 'loudest voices' or the 'usual suspects' who are already active in the community. The strategy should explicitly indicate how the council will engage with hard to reach residents.

- In the context of budget cuts, it is important to avoid duplication and co-produce with other partners.

- Co-production takes a considerable amount of time, but often council staff are asked to deliver things at short notice

- The language of 'us' (i.e. the council) and implies that the power remains with the council.

- To what extent is this duplicating the democratic process? Elected officials are intended to represent local people.

- The word 'co-production' is 'too officer friendly and not resident friendly'. 'Partnership framework' was suggested as an alternative.

- 'There seems to be a lot of focus on documentation and governance rather than practical action on the streets.'

Some key points that emerged from the actions on **developing council plans and commission services in a way that involves community assets and is driven by outcomes** were:

- The council should financially compensate residents if they are expected to help deliver services and outcomes. It is very difficult to depend on volunteers, as many people cannot commit to this long-term as they have to prioritise other aspects of their lives.

- Identifying 'assets' runs the risk of prioritising people who already are able to participate as 'assets' and does not help to develop the capacity of other residents who are not engaged.

- The council will need to ensure that when 'outsourcing services to the community', residents are capable of taking on this work.

- In addition to identifying the physical assets available, spaces that have fallen into disrepair or have been abandoned should also be identified. The community should have a say in how to revitalise these spaces.

- An outcomes-based approach is useful, but some services are 'outcomes' in themselves (e.g. libraries, parks, etc.). An outcome-based approach should not de-prioritise these types of services.

Pledge 2: Be open and connected

Respondents to the online consultation were asked to comment on specific actions identified in the Community Engagement Strategy that will enable the council to achieve Pledge 2 (Be open and connected). Three broad categories of action were given (see chart below) with more specific actions detailed in addition to these. The chart shows that the majority of respondents agreed with the actions identified in the framework.

Online Survey Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree that this action will help us to achieve Pledge 2?

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Tend to agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree / don't know ■ Tend to disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Action	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree / don't know	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Involve communities through elected representatives	34%	37%	14%	8%	7%
Improve transparency and accountability	42%	39%	12%	4%	4%
Increase support for people to take part in community life	39%	39%	15%	4%	2%

Source: Community Engagement Strategy online survey. Minimum sample size = 132

In addition, respondents were able to provide free-text responses to these actions. Some key points that emerged from the actions on **involving communities through elected representatives** were:

- 'Ask the Mayor' events may just provide another platform for the 'loud minority' rather than the 'silent contented majority'.

- Transport should be provided so that older and disabled residents can take part in a non-digital way.

- The times, places and styles of events should be designed to be inclusive.

- Emphasising resident engagement with the Mayor directly makes the role of ward councillors unclear.

- Rather than feedback and action going through the Mayor, 'a return to decision-making by elected committees will improve democratic accountability'.

- 'Local elected representatives' should be sider than just ward councillors, and include residents and community groups.

- These events should be widely publicised to reach a larger audience with details about what will be discussed and how residents can get involved. Using the usual communication channels (including social media) will only reach those who are already engaged with the council.

- There should also be information available *after* the event so that people who were unable to attend can find out what was discussed.

- The council should consider whether digital content (such as video), which is expensive to produce, is necessary and justified.

- Real-time feedback would help events to feel meaningful, for example 'you decide' events that were held in previous years used hand-held devices for people to vote.

Key points that were raised about the actions on **improving transparency and accountability** were:

- The council should look for new, alternative ways to increase participation and improve transparency rather than 'redesigning old models'.

- Since meetings usually take place during the working day, the ability to take part remotely may help. However, it would be more useful if meetings were during the evening or on weekends.

- There is too much emphasis on digital technology. Some residents also don't have access to, or don't want to use, social media. These events could also be connected to Idea Stores through a 'live feed' so those who don't have digital access could still participate.

- The council must ensure that the digital tools on offer are accessible to all, including those with hearing or visual impairments.

- More information should be available on decision making processes which are 'alien' to most residents.

- Most residents don't have time in their everyday lives to watch committee meetings. They want to know what is being discussed about the issues that affect them in a straightforward, accessible communication.

- Improving the council website will also help to improve transparency and accountability. Many residents find it difficult to navigate.

Key points that emerged about the actions on **increasing support for people to take part in community life** were:
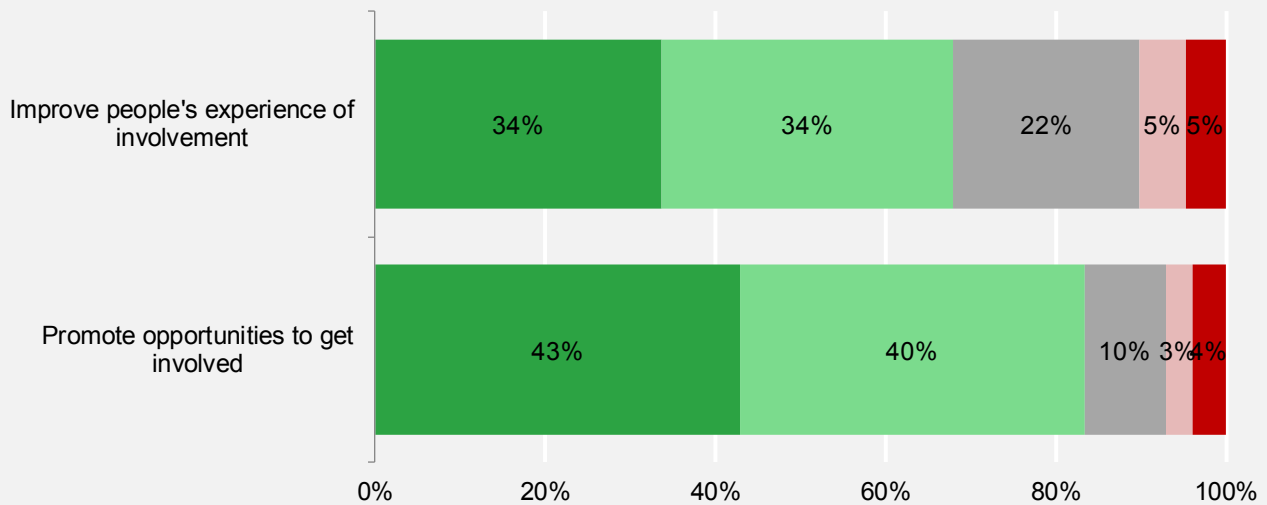
- There should be a dedicated volunteering team within the council which is responsible for "networking with the third sector, increasing community participation, driving up staff volunteering, improving Corporate Social Responsibility and integrating it into our procurement strategy."

- 'CanDo' was an effective grass roots programme to build stronger communities, but its funding has been cut.

- It is unclear how the Strategic Partnership board will interact with elected representatives, who already have the role of developing a vision and plan for the borough.

- "It is important to look beyond established groups and encourage people not already engaged (such as young people, single professionals, isolated older people) to get involved."

- "I think that people either want to be involved in their community or don't, and that people tend to be quite narrowly focused on such issues, only taking interest when it affects them; e.g., their bins aren't taken away. Encouraging people to be involved that don't want to be would require such a dramatic shift that I doubt there is the required resource."

- Previous attempt at neighbourhood planning have not been successful because there is tension between existing local groups.

Pledge 3: Keep it simple

Respondents to the online consultation were asked to comment on specific actions identified in the Community Engagement Strategy that will enable the council to achieve Pledge 3 (Keep it simple). Two broad categories of action were given (see chart below) with more specific actions detailed in addition to these. The chart shows that the majority of respondents agreed with the actions identified in the framework.

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Tend to agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Tend to disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Improve people's experience of involvement: 34% | 34% | 22% | 5% | 5%

Promote opportunities to get involved: 43% | 40% | 10% | 3% | 4%

Source: Community Engagement Strategy online survey. Minimum sample size = 126

In addition, respondents were able to provide free-text responses to these actions. Some key points that emerged from the actions on **improving people's experience of involvement** were:
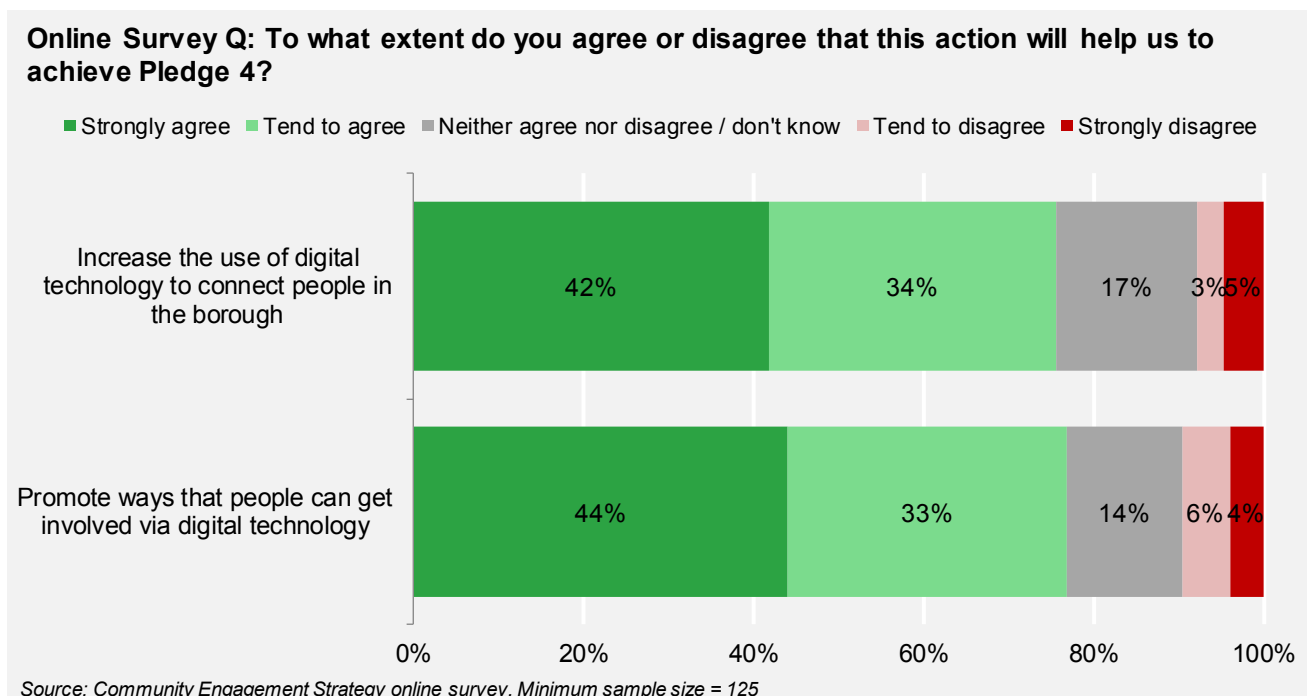
- There should be more of a 'you said, we did' focus on the council's website.

- "Engagement theory and methodology has a place - but should not replace common sense local connectedness, which may be more fluid and ad hoc than a highly academic approach."

- The language around involvement techniques is too officer-focussed and may be difficult for people to understand.

- "Minimum standards needs to have clear equalities remit and clear monitoring of equalities need to be carried out at all stages"

- "All of the techniques mentioned mean nothing if there are few resources available. Without tackling underlying inequalities the ability to engage in meaningful dialogue and more importantly the ability to act on the views of the local community are impossible. Therefore it is more frustrating if the community are constantly being asked for their views but nothing seems to improve because of the lack of resources available to implement improvements."

- Engagement is often focussed on residents giving their views to the council, but there should also be forums for neighbours, community groups etc. to get together to discuss issues about their neighbourhoods and present solutions.

- These methods could be very resource intensive and may not be value for money.

- Many respondents were supportive of the online involvement tracker.

Key points about the actions on **promoting opportunities to get involved** were:

- "Getting locals involved in looking after their own area is vital. A sense of ownership and empowerment is key."

- The council should not be overly reliant on online tools, as these may exclude some residents.

- "I think the consultation calendar and information points are excellent and reflect a long -term commitment."

- Align consultation activities so that residents do not suffer from 'consultation fatigue'.

- "I really like the idea of taking consultations to people, rather than expecting us to find them. We want to give our opinions but we don't have time. Make it easy for us. How can you fit engagement into our routines, what we're already doing? Can I give you feedback whilst waiting for the bus? Or when I'm reading something at the Idea store? Or is there a way to do this through my phone?"

- Many respondents felt positive about reaching out to young people, but some felt that young people were being unfairly prioritised over other groups, for example older people.

Pledge 4: Share it

Respondents to the online consultation were asked to comment on specific actions identified in the Community Engagement Strategy that will enable the council to achieve Pledge 4 (Share it). Two broad categories of action were given (see chart below) with more specific actions detailed in addition to these. The chart shows that the majority of respondents agreed with the actions identified in the framework.

Online Survey Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree that this action will help us to achieve Pledge 4?

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Tend to agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree / don't know ■ Tend to disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Action	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree / don't know	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Increase the use of digital technology to connect people in the borough	42%	34%	17%	3%	5%
Promote ways that people can get involved via digital technology	44%	33%	14%	6%	4%

Source: Community Engagement Strategy online survey. Minimum sample size = 125

In addition, respondents were able to provide free-text responses to these actions. Some key points that emerged from the actions on **increasing the use of digital technology to connect people in the borough** were:

- Digital platforms will not be accessible or appropriate for everyone, for example older people. Digital channels must be complimented with more traditional techniques.

- Some people may need training in order to use digital platforms. This could be achieved through joining with schools to get children and young people train others.

- "Will residents be protected from advertising, having their information sold on etc? What about data protection and data retention?"

- The council could use Facebook ads to connect with residents who are not already engaged with the council on social media.

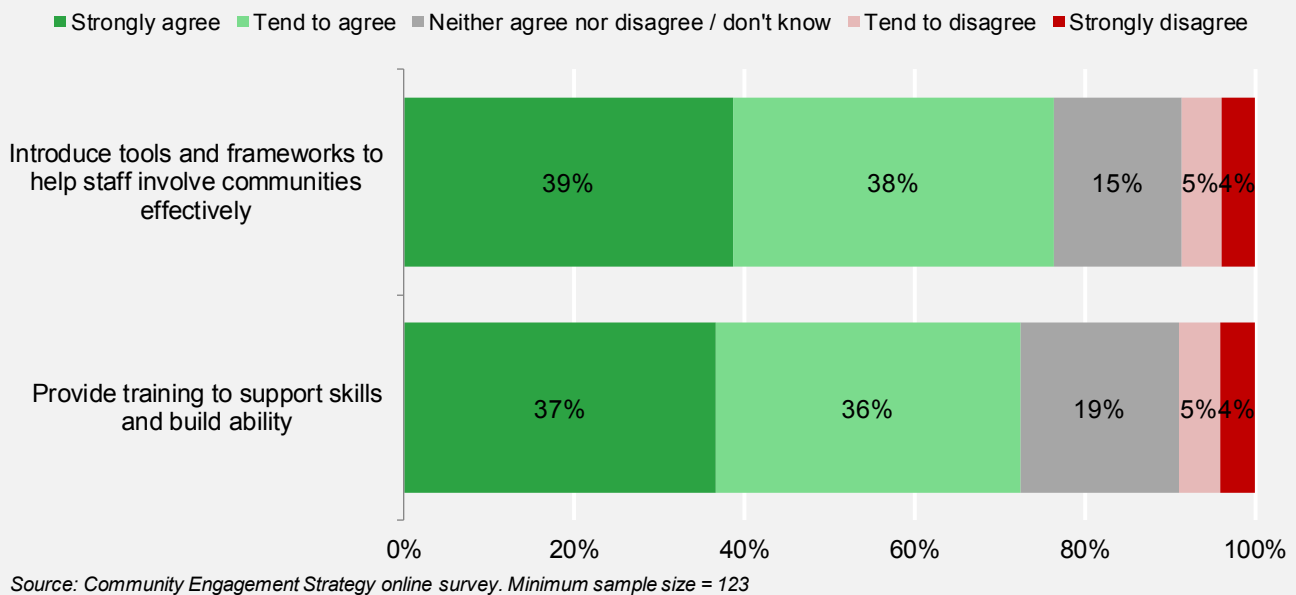- Many respondents were supportive of the My Tower Hamlets hub.

Key points about **promoting ways that people can get involved via digital technology** were:

- Many respondents felt that this was very important in making sure that residents are not excluded. However, others thought this was a 'waste of time and money' and it was not the council's job to train people in digital skills.

- "Investment in ESOL alongside [digital skills training] will be important as many of those who are digitally excluded also speak English as a second language and can therefore struggle to understand information provided."

- "If vulnerable people do not have these skills, they might not have the digital hardware either. A system of loaning people digital technology (smartphone, laptop, access to desktop computer in library) could be envisioned."

Pledge 5: Enable

Respondents to the online consultation were asked to comment on specific actions identified in the Community Engagement Strategy that will enable the council to achieve Pledge 5 (Enable). Two broad categories of action were given (see chart below) with more specific actions detailed in addition to these. The chart shows that the majority of respondents agreed with the actions identified in the framework.

Online Survey Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree that this action will help us to achieve Pledge 5?

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Tend to agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree / don't know ■ Tend to disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Action	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree / don't know	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Introduce tools and frameworks to help staff involve communities effectively	39%	38%	15%	5%	4%
Provide training to support skills and build ability	37%	36%	19%	5%	4%

Source: Community Engagement Strategy online survey. Minimum sample size = 123

In addition, respondents were able to provide free-text responses to these actions. Some key points that emerged from the actions on **introducing tools and frameworks to help staff involve communities effectively** were:

- "Toolkits are the lifeblood of any healthy local government organisation."

- Community engagement shouldn't be top down. The community should be involved in the development of the toolkit.

- A single point of contact for advice and resource would be very helpful for staff.

- The approach should remain flexible so that staff are able to adapt to the needs of the community. The toolkit should not be "one roadmap for how to do inclusive engagement. It should contain a suite of useful tools that can be adapted, ideas to take and experiment with."

- "Staff need to be upskilled in involving communities more effectively. Surveys and focus groups don't work well anymore and there are many methods from other disciplines to draw from to bring engagement into the 21st century. I love that Tower Hamlets recognises this and is doing something about it."

- Keeping the workforce trained will be a challenge if staff turnover is high.

Key points that emerged about the actions on **providing training to support skills and build ability** were:

- Training should not be limited to council staff. It should be available to partner organisations and residents.

- Training should be focussed on staff who are expected to deliver the commitments, rather than a blanket roll out for all staff.

Recommended actions

Respondents to the face-to-face questionnaire were not asked to comment on the specific actions set out by the Community Engagement Framework. Instead, they were asked what they thought the council should do to bring about these commitments to community engagement. Suggestions included:
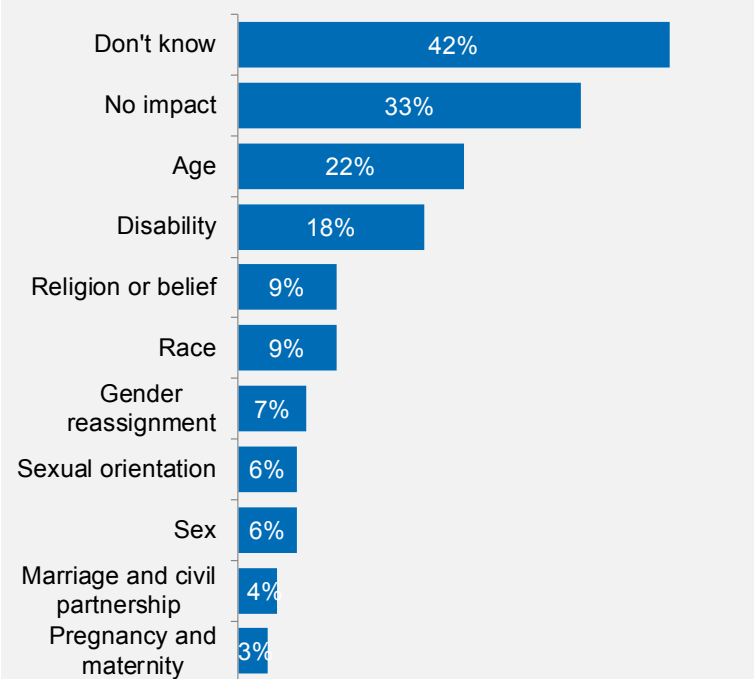
- Holding more public events that are widely publicised and are inclusive of all groups
- Publishing a detailed plan with measurable goals that can be tracked by residents
- Providing more training, tools and resources for organisations and residents
- Utilising social media
- Providing information in hard copy
- Involving young people more

Equalities impact

Respondents to the online questionnaire were asked if residents with protected characteristics (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) would be negatively impacted by the draft Community Engagement Framework. They could select more than one option.

Of the consultation respondents who answered this question, 42% said they did not know if there was a negative equalities impact and 33% said that there would be no impact. However, 22% said there would be a negative impact in regards to age and 18% said there would be a negative impact in regards to disability. A smaller proportion of respondents said there would be a negative impact on other protected characteristics (see chart).

Online Survey Q: In your opinion, are any of the following protected characteristics (as defined by the Equalities Act 2010) going to be negatively impacted by the draft Community Engagement Framework?

Characteristic	Percentage
Don't know	42%
No impact	33%
Age	22%
Disability	18%
Religion or belief	9%
Race	9%
Gender reassignment	7%
Sexual orientation	6%
Sex	6%
Marriage and civil partnership	4%
Pregnancy and maternity	3%

Source: Community Engagement Strategy online survey. Sample size = 106
Note: Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100.

Respondents were asked to give free-text feedback about why they felt protected groups would be affected and what the council could do to mitigate against this. Key points were:

- The focus on online engagement will adversely affect older people, disabled people, those from low incomes, and other vulnerable groups who may not have access to these tools, the skills to use them, or the desire to be involved in this way.

- "Focusing on local communities can have the impact of silencing minority voices, or for part of their needs to be not be discussed due to concerns of how others might respond."

- Meeting and event times need to take into account resident needs, for example not clashing with prayer times and normal working hours.
- Community events tend to focus around religious communities which can exclude those without a belief.