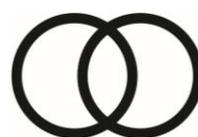


Hounslow Community Engagement Review

Final report



CLES
the national organisation
for local economies

Hounslow Community Engagement Review

Final report

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Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES)

info@cles.org.uk | +44 (0) 161 832 7871

www.cles.org.uk | @CLEStinkdo

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Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction	7
1. Findings	10
2. What is good community engagement?	25
3. Good practice examples.....	28
4. A way forward.....	34
Appendix 1 – Methodology	54
Appendix 2 - Examples of good practice within Hounslow	56

Executive Summary

Why is this work important?

The Covid-19 pandemic threw into light the significance of strong, resilient communities and their ability to respond to a crisis. Within Hounslow, the relationship between the council, the community and the VCSE sector was rapidly redefined, with partnership working at the core of the response to the pandemic. Reviewing London Borough of Hounslow Council's (LBH) approach to community engagement cannot be divorced from this reality, which now offers space for the community to have a truly meaningful relationship with the council to shape the future of the borough. Community engagement should be viewed as part of the democratic function of a local authority, creating routes to, and providing support for, people to take ownership of and shape their locality. The question of how communities can best respond to all of these pressing issues has never been more important.

Findings

Culture

Building a culture where creativity and dynamism are encouraged will be key, particularly in moving forward and building a new social contract with citizens. We argue in our way forward, that councillors will be central to how the 'One Hounslow' concept is related to citizens and communities, and therefore they need to be engaged in what this culture shift means for them.

Through a period of reflection, more can be done to ensure that existing skills, resources and assets within LBH are being fully utilised, working in new ways across departments and with wider partners, with the VCSE and with residents directly.

Knowledge & understanding

Building knowledge and understanding of communities is a whole-organisation responsibility and all staff should be encouraged to build their understanding of communities. Community engagement training should be built into induction and personal development plans for all staff to realise an ambition of being a community led organisation. Social research, insight and intelligence gathering need to take a higher priority, and a cross departmental 'Community Intelligence Hub' could bring together knowledge and understanding, drawing on existing resources dedicated to insight, intelligence and community engagement. In support of this, the role community assets play in local neighbourhoods need to be understood in a broader sense.

Approach

LBH's "5 Values" need to be embedded into a Thriving Communities Action Plan which drives an approach to building trust with communities. There is a need to develop an overarching view of team and departmental approaches to community engagement to allow for more joined up approaches, and investment in relationship building needs to be highly valued and protected. While there is a need to ensure that key messages are well communicated to all groups in society, there is also a need for more effective mechanisms which empower communities and facilitate greater inclusion.

Methods

Methods for community engagement should be informed by intelligence and insight. Truly effective engagement meets residents where they are, both literally and figuratively and a movement towards methods of co-production can improve publicly valued outcomes and build more empowering relationships with the public. While digital channels are growing in importance and can increase participation, councillors need to be encouraged and supported to use new technologies for engagement and the digitally excluded must not be forgotten. More active two-way communication is required so that local residents know that their views have been heard and so that we can learn from our experience which methods result in the most effective forms of influence.

What is good community engagement

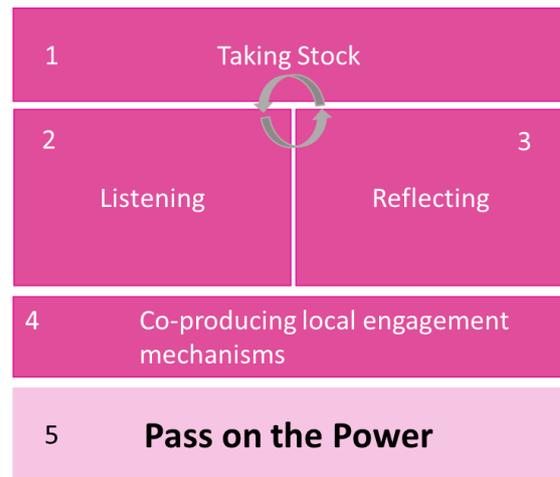
Based on LBH's Thriving Communities Strategy, 'good' engagement in Hounslow should focus on developing communities' voices, increasing their ability to influence, and supporting them to take action in shaping their communities and the borough as a whole. 'Good' engagement in the borough will look different for both council and community, with different outcomes for each group and requirements to make them happen. When engagement is done well it can serve a democratic function and enable communities to use their individual and collective power to shape where they live. Given the expected impact of Covid-19 on the borough, approaches to engagement which can foster action and potentially support the development of community initiatives and businesses could be investigated, alongside ways to elevate voice and improve representation.

Good practice examples

Viewing engagement in this way will necessitate revisiting the roles of councillors, and an examination of new potential methods. These could include co-production, deliberative and participatory methods, and a deeper consideration of community development and organising. With a multitude of potential approaches, LBH has the opportunity to experiment and work with its community to identify what could work locally drawing from the examples outlined in Section 3.

A way forward

We have developed an overarching framework and phased approach to the ambition of 'Passing on the Power'. Our proposed 'way forward' builds on our findings, draws in examples of good practice from elsewhere and proposes a five phased process, from taking stock to ultimately 'Passing on the Power', with our broad recommendations for doing this set out below:



Taking stock

- Community engagement requires a maintained high priority
- We suggest a short period of internal reflection to assess what do we know (and what don't we know) about our communities

Listening

- Support 'communities' to have 'big local' conversations
- Develop local leadership
- Define local identities and geographies
- Resource a social action micro-grant

Reflecting

- One Hounslow' needs to have relationships with citizens and their communities at its heart
- Make the most of the mix through recruitment/on-boarding
- Rethink current internal resources
- Develop oversight functions
- Councillors take on a key role in engagement

Co-producing

- Build out from the 'Community Hub' as platform to engage
- Redefined and realigned: Area Forum to Neighbourhood Hub
- Develop Community Hub > Neighbourhood Hub communication
- Facilitate social action

Pass on the power

- Investigate collaborative methods to generate solutions
- Build a 'One Hounslow' citizen deliberation process
- Hold a One Hounslow Summit/Assembly

Introduction

This report for London Borough of Hounslow (LBH) seeks to inform its next steps in building its relationship with Hounslow's residents, developing an approach to post-Covid-19 recovery which is truly owned, informed and co-delivered by its many and diverse communities.

This research aligns with LBH's ambitions to develop the council's engagement approach within a wider swathe of work focussing on social capital and investing in communities. This is interwoven with the council's recovery work to build a more resilient Hounslow following Covid-19.

To inform the further development of a progressive approach to community engagement, CLES were commissioned to conduct a comprehensive review of LBH's community engagement and develop recommendations to support the council's wider aspirations.

This report is split into the following sections:

- Section 1 outlines the findings of the research. This section reviews current engagement activity, presents the strengths and weaknesses of the current approach and provides practical recommendations for how to improve the culture, the knowledge & understanding, approach and methods that shape this;
- Sections 2 and 3 outline what good community engagement looks like, including LBH's current perspective on what good is, and outlines how this approach could be developed, with associated examples of good practice;
- Section 4 outlines a broader roadmap of how Hounslow could take forward its approach to engagement. All individuals who have participated in the research have had the opportunity to shape this.

Why is this work important?

The Covid-19 pandemic threw into light the significance of strong, resilient communities and their ability to respond to a crisis. Within Hounslow, the relationship between the council, the community and the VCSE sector was rapidly redefined, with partnership working at the core of the response to Covid-19. The power and resource of communities came to the fore, with mutual aid groups and other community groups taking on significant roles in distributing food and providing support to some of the most vulnerable people in the borough. The council took up the role of leader and facilitator, redeploying staff to the Community Hub, which has been a significant source of learning when considering how LBH should build its relationship with the community in the new reality emerging from the pandemic.

Reviewing LBH's approach to community engagement cannot be divorced from this reality, which now offers space for the community to have a truly meaningful relationship with LBH to shape the future of the borough. This is particularly significant in the face of a burgeoning economic crisis compounded by the potential impact of Brexit and the realities of the climate crisis.

All of these factors are set against the wider national and international context of a period where increasing frustration amongst the electorate with representative democracy, has resulted in increased protest voting, increased polarisation due to adversarial methods of debating key issues (particularly with the rise of social media), and an ongoing trend of voter apathy amongst the younger population. These challenges to democracy in the 21st Century are deeply intertwined in the way that communities and individuals interact with local and national government. As such, community engagement should be viewed as part of the democratic function of a local authority, creating routes to, and providing support for, people to take ownership of and shape their locality. The question of how communities can best respond to all of these pressing issues has never been more important.

London Borough of Hounslow's ambitions

It is clear through the council's strategic documents that there is a strong ambition to build upon and reinforce the connection between LBH and community. Predominantly articulated through the Thriving Communities Strategy, the council's "5 Values", and the "Leading Hounslow" paper to cabinet, it is clear that the council is ready to act on its pre- and pandemic learning to build community voice and action into its plans for the future. We heard from many people within Hounslow about their views of 'what good looks like', however there is a dissonance between ambitions around practice and the realities of what has been possible.

The development of a new approach to engagement is not only borne out of the desire for a new way of working, but out of necessity. The role of community power has been identified as key in moving forward post-Covid-19. Ongoing concerns about further cuts to public spending, and its impact on the communities hardest hit by the pandemic, have created questions as to how the community can work with the council to sustain key services and unlock local resources (both financial and social) to shelter the borough from the wave of economic, social and health impacts which are due to break over the coming year.

"We will need to do far more to connect with communities on issues that matter to them in order that the benefits of investment and development are more apparent, and genuinely deal with local problems and issues" – Leading Hounslow

Moving forward

Addressing the biggest challenges our society faces will require informed and collective action, tackling the structural inequalities which have been exacerbated by the pandemic, endeavouring to reach carbon zero by 2030, developing social and economic resilience to future shocks however they appear.

With 2020 as an unprecedentedly challenging year, there is nevertheless an opportunity to grow and nurture the new approaches to, and relationships with, the community which have strengthened through the pandemic in Hounslow.

Key to this will be a deep understanding of Hounslow's communities, creating ways and means for them to shape the future of the borough, whether that is through community initiatives to tackle the core issues in a neighbourhood, delivering services in partnership with the community, or developing ways for the community to deliver a new economy for the borough rooted in serving people, place and planet.

1. Findings

The impact of Covid-19 on community engagement

“We are all now aware of how unprepared we are in our relationship with the community” - Officer

Prior to Covid-19 the relationship between the community and council was developing, with improvements observed over the past 4-5 years. However, the council's initial response to the pandemic required something of a leap in their approach to partnership working and communication with the public. As a result of the pandemic, LBH has become more outward facing, with stronger connections to communities through direct relationships with the groups that operate in their areas, and through the methods used to stay in touch with vulnerable residents. The community has valued the relationships which developed as a result of the urgent need for highly joined-up working during lockdown. These relationships have resulted in LBH starting to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the borough's communities.

Covid-19 has also demonstrated the need for the council to connect more comprehensively and meaningfully with the communities which are most affected by the pandemic, such as young people and Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, in order to design a recovery that is fit for purpose and meets the needs of the borough. These groups at present are underrepresented, and there is an opportunity for the council to develop a more defined approach to engaging with them.

Digital technology came to prominence during the pandemic as a key means of communicating with the community, and more broadly. The role of the Community Hub during the pandemic has shone a light on the challenges in addressing complex issues. Examples such as the emerging Conversation Cafés and the Hounslow Micro Gardens project, give a clear illustration of how the council is applying learning and insight to shape new approaches to engagement. Data is also being used to design targeted responses to build resilience in areas where services are lacking.

We set out our findings in the remainder of this section under the headings of culture, knowledge and understanding, approach and methods.

Culture

Culture shift needs to percolate down faster

The 'One Hounslow' programme of reform has been designed to shift the way the council operates, breaking down internal silos. This ongoing programme of deep transformation, (which started prior to Covid-19, significantly disrupted and

accelerated by it), has become even more important for how the council moves forward in developing its relationships with the community. As with any programme of transformation, it takes time for cultures to shift and align, and while there are numerous good examples of where 'One Hounslow' is starting to have an impact on how engagement is conceived, there is equally still progress to be made.

The recent work to develop LBH's "5 Values" has been highlighted by many as being a central and core element in how the council moves forward. The values are:

- Lead with heart
- Do new
- Pass on the power
- Make the most of the mix
- Be a rock

Vital for this audit of community engagement, the value of 'Passing on the Power' acknowledges a need to move away from 'old fashioned command and control'.

"The organisation was in a muddle, with lack of clarity of what we were about. The work on our Values has really helped to reset internally...the process has been really valuable" - Officer

It has been suggested to us that the shifts in culture across council departments need to keep pace with the shifts in the culture of the leadership to ensure all people are on the same journey. Covid-19 has clearly thrown up the whole deck of cards, but encouragingly they appear to have landed in a way in which collaboration and joint working has improved, supported by new ways of working and the ease of digital interaction.

'One Hounslow' concept not yet clear re citizens and communities

'One Hounslow' has not yet focused on how external relationships with citizens need to be developed, which is where this work comes in. Given how we have conceptualised a more fundamental role for local councillors in our proposed way forward (section 4) we would first consider the role they play in building relationships with citizens, gathering and feeding back insight, amplifying the voice of local people, and enabling them to engage in processes of co-design and co-production.

"We don't hear the voice of our councillors. They are key connectors to the community"
- Councillor

Community engagement requires a higher priority

Pre-Covid-19, community engagement had not had a high enough priority, and engagement hadn't featured as a core responsibility within the corporate structure. While research had been commissioned,¹ many of the recommendations were not

¹ m.e.l research (2018). Resident Engagement Workshops. London Borough of Hounslow.

acted upon and frustrations had arisen with the implementation of the Thriving Communities Strategy, which was noted by community-based stakeholders and has been a point of frustration.

There are clear moves in a positive direction, with appointments, the development of roles and responsibilities and relocation of staffing to more appropriate departments, however, there remains more to be done in this regard to ensure that existing assets are being fully utilised. The Community Recovery taskforce which has emerged since the Covid-19 pandemic, with its three workstreams, does however demonstrate how LBH has responded with a new priority to build its relationships with the wider community, learning from the way local people and local communities responded to the public health emergency, and building on this to shape a new relationship with citizens.

Summary

In summary of this section on *Culture* we make the following suggestions moving forward:

- Building a culture where creativity and dynamism are encouraged will be key, particularly in moving forward and building a new social contract with citizens.
- Councillors will be central to how the 'One Hounslow' concept is related to citizens and communities, and therefore they need to be engaged in what it means for them.
- Through a period of reflection, more can be done to ensure that existing skills, resources and assets within Hounslow are being fully utilised, working in new ways across departments and with wider partners, with the VCSE and with residents directly.

Knowledge & understanding

Develop more detailed understanding of communities

A reoccurring message from both internal and external stakeholders is that the council does not currently fully understand the full breadth of its communities' needs or its assets. While there are many examples of good consultation and well planned and executed engagement, these are not always founded upon deep insight of the issues and priorities of local communities. Social research, insight and intelligence gathering is argued to have been limited, and engagement work has been focused on specific services or issues, which where critiqued, are suggested to have decisions already made within them.

"We are going to 'tick a box', we need to shift to genuine engagement with people where they are" - Officer

There is a need to gain deeper insight from the diversity of the borough

While there is already extensive, ongoing work which has sought to improve LBH's reach into communities, there has been a challenge in understanding and engaging with the full diversity of the borough.

Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities

Resident surveys and engagement exercises repeatedly highlight a disconnect with many of the BAME communities in the borough. Given that almost 53% of Hounslow residents are from BAME backgrounds, with many new communities having settled in the borough, and the fact that this appears to be a group that is difficult to engage, it is surprising that there is little heritage of key messages being translated into community languages.

Driven in part by the emergency of the public health crisis and a need to disseminate clear messages on public health, better connections are now being built with local faith leaders and groups, with growing examples of collaboration. Key messages are now being translated into the top 5 community languages, which has been welcomed by community leaders and council partners, however anecdotal feedback suggests that this has been done quite poorly (with meaning quite literally lost in translation), with an outsourced provider providing texts which LBH staff have identified as poor, and have been able to improve on with their own language skills.

We would suggest a more robust strategy is developed to support communication of key messages which can be delivered in community languages where required and appropriate. It has been suggested to us that the borough's Afghani, Somali and Jewish communities are particularly difficult to reach. More fundamentally, the council should consider why BAME communities may not engage with them on a more structural level, and how to factor in the presence of structural inequalities and historic prejudices when considering how communities may interact, or not, with them (see Sections 2 and 3).

Younger people

Gathering insight on the needs of younger people also appears to be a challenge. Significant cuts to the Youth Service have resulted in real difficulty in reaching young people. While the borough does have a Youth Council and a Junior Citizens' scheme, which has been praised, more work is needed to engage the wider young population. Formal engagement mechanisms such as Area Forums and Tenants' and Residents' Forum are not attracting younger people, and there is a clear need to move beyond some of these very 'traditional' mechanisms to appeal to younger people.

There are good examples of work with young people. Recently a film was made with young people to capture their needs and views, however the young people involved don't appear to have had feedback on how their views will influence change, and very few councillors and LBH officers engaged with the efforts made to share their work. A key learning point here is the need to maintain momentum. Communication and feedback are crucial to building a trusted relationship with young people and in encouraging them to use their voice locally. The climate change agenda is felt to be a particularly important opportunity to rethink how to engage with young people.

Geographical diversity

The South and East of Hounslow are suggested to be more involved with traditional methods of engagement than others. Although Central and Western areas have been more difficult to engage, there has been some success in utilising different approaches, such as community development, which has been very well received and has built relationships between communities and the council. Parts of the borough more transient populations and higher numbers of private renters, such as Central Hounslow, are areas in which the council naturally has weaker links and present challenges around meaningful engagement.

White, working-class residents are also particularly difficult to engage with, and there is a sense that this group (particularly in the West of the borough) feel isolated and unheard. There has recently been a hostile response to Black Lives Matter in the West of the borough, highlighting that the community feel disengaged and disenfranchised. Work is therefore needed to increase connection and conversation with this section of the community.

"It's not just about consultation and engagement, it's about when you make decisions about areas and spaces, particularly for the poorer areas, they have less voice[...] The poor working class areas, BAME areas, don't have a voice at all"
- Officer

The role of community assets needs to be understood in a broader sense

There is potential for LBH to increase its understanding of community assets². Community assets in a narrow sense are often taken to refer to public buildings, which have either been transferred to, or are managed by the community. However, community assets need to be understood in a broader sense as the collective resources which individuals and communities have at their disposal; that can be leveraged to develop solutions to local challenges, from promoting inclusion to improving the economic and social wellbeing of citizens.

² Physical assets may include libraries, health centres, leisure centres, parks, GP practices for example, but equally banks, post offices and shops. Voluntary and community sector groups such as faith groups, sports clubs, support groups, residents' associations are all community assets. Assets would also include individuals such as volunteers, families and community leaders, and residents' skills, ideas and connections within the community.

Developing an understanding of these assets through dialogue with the community and understanding the strengths and resources within neighbourhoods can help to uncover where assets are lacking, or potential resources can be enhanced to support a community. As part of LBH's review of assets, consideration should be given to how they can open conversations with local communities, boost community activity and promote economic opportunity.

New intelligence hub presents an opportunity to support knowledge and insight

LBH needs to develop more of a live understanding of what people are concerned about, so this can shape and inform where to invest limited time and capacity. Intelligence and data sharing within the council and between partners has been highlighted as a challenge, with data sharing agreements/protocols and legacy IT systems sometimes serving as a barrier to effective knowledge and data sharing. Covid-19 has exposed the challenges in this; in trying to identify and contact vulnerable people, data protection issues and difficulties around data sharing have become clearer.

The gap in knowledge and insight sharing means that many departments have only a fragmented understanding of the communities they support. Although collectively there is lots of knowledge about the issues Hounslow's residents face, many officers are only able to talk in very general terms about communities. This has clear issues for processes of engagement.

We understand that an "intelligence hub" has been recently developed and is starting to connect internal resources. By harnessing information and knowledge from across the council on the borough and its communities, the intelligence hub will play an invaluable role in supporting the development of relationships with the community.

The role of local councillors as representatives and advocates means that they have a deep-rooted knowledge of their communities, however, this knowledge is not recognised as playing a role in the council's efforts to gather insight. Councillors need to be recognised as champions of local issues, feeding in local understanding and shaping messages from within the council. This is particularly important right now in the current context of public health messaging. This renamed 'Community Intelligence Hub' could sit at the centre of the Community Solutions model.

Building staff knowledge and understanding of local communities

As outlined above, a cross-departmental 'Community Intelligence Hub' could serve as a valuable central resource and fill gaps in insight gathering, but there also needs to be a focus on building staff knowledge and understanding of the local community. Given the scale of the economic challenges that will be faced as we move through this global health crisis, everyone in the council should have an understanding of how communities are being affected and how their role contributes to improving the borough.

Building knowledge and understanding of communities is a whole-organisation responsibility. Community engagement is not conducted only by those with it in their job title, and we would suggest a systematic approach to building in understanding of communities to all job roles. This could be done by developing staff induction processes and training and would support staff to get to know the geographical and demographic diversity of the borough, and the needs and assets of different neighbourhoods and communities.

"I asked my junior colleagues to spend the day [in the local centre], to just observe what was going on and to see how people were interacting. They didn't even know where the [local centre] was" – Anon

We have been made aware of a previous Consultation and Engagement Network which was in operation until a few years ago, with trained consultation champions from around the council. While the network has not functioned as anticipated, it does demonstrate clear understanding of the need for individuals to champion relationship building with the community to enable effective consultation and engagement. We would suggest reviewing the content of the training provided and building this into induction and personal development plans for all staff, to form a more sustainable approach to community engagement and relationship building.

"I don't think you should get a job in this council unless you have some sense of how to build community relationships" – Officer

Summary

In summary of this section on *Knowledge & Understanding* we make the following suggestions moving forward:

- Social research, insight and intelligence gathering should take a higher priority.
- There is a need to ensure that key messages are well communicated to all groups in society, with the ability to communicate to new arrivals in community languages as appropriate.
- The role that community assets play in local neighbourhoods needs to be understood in a broader sense.
- A cross-departmental 'Community Intelligence Hub' could bring together knowledge and understanding, drawing on existing resources dedicated to insight, intelligence and community engagement.
- Building knowledge and understanding of communities is a whole-organisation responsibility, and all staff should be encouraged to build their understanding of communities.

Approach

The council's "Values" need to be embedded in a Thriving Communities Action Plan

The council's new Values can now feed into and inform a more strongly articulated vision for the role of community engagement. The Thriving Communities Strategy outlines quite clearly what a thriving community should look like, and we would suggest that the strategy is reviewed in light of the development of the "5 Values". This exercise would help to embed the Values as an inherent part of all services, programmes and strategies that LBH delivers. Following on from the council undertaking this review and incorporation of the Values, we would also suggest the development of an action plan to move forward the areas of the strategy which have yet to be addressed, through the lens of the newly agreed Values.

Resourcing engagement

Discussions with members of the public have highlighted some frustrations around the council having a high level of engagement with what is perceived to be part of the community which doesn't fully represent the borough as a whole.³ There is therefore an opportunity for the council to review its internal resourcing in this light and create more capacity to work with the whole borough by reallocating resource where possible, and broadening the scope of the Community Partnerships Unit's (CPU) engagement activity. The HRA funded engagement is felt to be sufficiently resourced and can therefore serve as a marker for a scaling up of investment.

As discussed above, dedicated resources will only serve as a supportive core, so genuine community engagement skills need to be embedded across the council to enable ways of working to shift. This will require a continued evolution of how the council organises itself, how it organises and conceptualises job roles moving forward, and how it uses its new value set to shape how, as an organisation it changes to reflect the needs of society in a deepening of the 'One Hounslow' model.

The previous role of Area Participation Officers (APO's), which were cut, highlights an approach to provide officer support for local engagement mechanisms. We suggest a similar level of resource is re-introduced but used in a different way; potentially to support community leaders and/or local councillors in taking on a role in stimulating 'big local' conversations (either through remuneration or funding resource within LBH).⁴

Investment in relationship building needs to be valued and protected

An investment in building relationships, and the time to develop trust and embed projects and engagement work in communities are all necessary to develop

³ It has been suggested that the revenue funding for consultation and engagement is heavily skewed towards council tenants, with 87% of available funding allocated to work with less than a fifth of the population (21.5% of the population (2018) rent from the local authority or a housing association).

⁴ The Area Forum Vice Chairs are remunerated, and their role was redefined to make them 'community champions' however there is little evidence that this has led to an increase in community engagement with area forums.

meaningful engagement in Hounslow. This work has historically been undervalued, and over leveraged, which in some cases has damaged the relationships and trust that the council has worked to develop with the community. There is a heavy reliance on the CPU team's knowledge, expertise, and relationships, and while the CPU's engagement team should be able to advise any department that is wanting to consult or engage, it clearly does not have the resources at present to maintain and develop all the relationships the council relies on to conduct engagement. As discussed above, knowledge and understanding needs to be built across LBH.

Existing oversight functions need strengthening

The Consultation Advisory Panel (CAP) is intended to have oversight of significant consultation and engagement processes, however it has been suggested that some departments do not prepare or lack the time to attend the meetings (which are organised on an ad-hoc basis with 7 days' notice, and usually take around an hour to consider a consultation) and therefore bypass it altogether. This formalised process, which is based on ensuring that major consultations are meeting statutory requirements, needs to be significantly rethought.

The CAP needs to provide a more effective mechanism to challenge approaches that are not inclusive enough or that do not encourage genuine engagement, influence and participation. It also needs to bring an increased level of accountability by improving feedback to communities on how their input has been used and acted upon, and by providing plain and honest reasons in cases where resident feedback is not implemented.

Approaches to community engagement need to be more joined up

Implementation of formal community engagement strategies tends to vary, with some teams lacking any specific engagement plan, but using their expertise and embeddedness in communities to gauge how and when to undertake engagement exercises. Other teams do have more formal consultation and engagement plans in place, which target specific sections of the community, particularly the hardest to reach BAME/faith communities. It is not clear if there is any overarching view of these team and departmental approaches, and how these are co-ordinated to reduce duplication and avoid consultation fatigue.

Opportunities to develop more tailored approaches to reach different communities

The main mechanisms that LBH has relied on to undertake community engagement have been very traditional in format (e.g. Area Forums, Tenants' & Residents' Forums). For many, these are felt to be outdated and not fit for purpose. These approaches are criticised for being overly bureaucratic and formal, which tends to attract a limited demographic (white, educated and older) and makes engagement less attractive to the wider citizenry.

Additionally, gaps in insight and intelligence on the diversity of the borough means that engagement is often designed and conducted in a format that does not always elicit a response from a diverse range of voices. While work with disabled people is suggested to be excellent, engaging BAME women is suggested to be challenging. Where segmented conversations have taken place, they are acknowledged to have been around stereotypical areas, for example specific efforts to engage women around childcare.

The continued use of traditional approaches to engagement presents a risk of stifling local democracy, creating distance between the local community and the council, and disempowering local councillors.

"We don't have particularly vociferous communities... I'm not sure if this is good, or it just reflects our disconnection with the community" - Officer

Empowering Hounslow's communities to take a lead in constructing engagement mechanisms that work best for them will help to encourage and facilitate greater inclusion, and whilst the usual participants will still be present and likely at the forefront, shifting the power over the narrative and removing barriers to participation would bring in opportunity to hear a wider range of voices.

Summary

In summary of this section on *Approach* we make the following suggestions moving forward:

- The council's "5 Values" need to be embedded in a Thriving Communities Action Plan.
- Genuine community engagement skills need to be embedded across the council to enable ways of working to shift.
- Investment in relationship building needs to be highly valued and protected.
- The council needs more effective mechanisms to challenge approaches that are not inclusive enough, or that do not encourage genuine engagement, influence and participation.
- There is a need to develop an overarching view of team and departmental approaches to community engagement to allow for more joined up approaches.
- Empowering Hounslow's communities to take a lead in constructing engagement mechanisms that work best for them will help to encourage and facilitate greater inclusion.

Methods

Methods for community engagement should be informed by intelligence and insight

As alluded to in the previous section, there has been little change to methods and mechanisms for engaging with the community over the years. While community needs have developed in one trajectory, local engagement mechanisms across the council have not, meaning engagement approaches are not always fit for purpose when listening to and acting upon local needs and feedback. The “standard” engagement methods that are often used do not accurately capture local voice, and in turn present a danger of engagement exercises being perceived as tokenistic and only implemented to ‘tick boxes’.

A ‘good’ approach to community engagement will be wholly dependent on the community, what’s important to them, and the local context and timing in which it is being delivered. Methods for community engagement should therefore be informed by intelligence and insight. Simply replicating a standard model or approach from elsewhere will likely be unsuccessful if the council cannot use insight of the communities it is trying to engage.

“Everyone jumps to a solution before understanding the problem” - Officer

The time and resource needed to enact good engagement is also consistently underestimated, with a perception that it’s “one last thing to get done”, whereas good engagement should be considered from the outset of a piece of work (see section 3).

Move towards methods of co-production

There is a well-established movement towards methods of co-production as a key driver for improving publicly valued outcomes (see section 3). The core emphasis of this is a move away from a paternalistic view of the public sector delivering services *for* the public, to an empowering view of the public sector delivering services *with* the public. Austerity has accelerated movement in this direction with a recognition that the council cannot deliver on all of the communities’ needs, and that honest and open conversations are needed in prioritising resources and making sure services deliver against community need. The lived experience⁵ of those that use services is being increasingly valued, with their voices being brought into decision making processes.

There does not, however, appear to be a rich vein of co-production within LBH, and there is some evidence to suggest resistance to it. This is due in part to resources, capacity and skills, and a resistance to relinquish power to the community, stemming from an underlying apprehension as to whether the community will

⁵ The term “lived experience” refers to the way in which sections of the community experience differences, disadvantage (and sometimes benefit) based on their social, economic or demographic characteristics. For example, when women talk about what it’s like to be female in a predominantly male workplace, they are describing their lived experiences.

make 'the right choices'. Where examples of co-production do exist, the staff leading these felt as if they were pulling the council into new territory, taking people out of their comfort zones and pursuing novel approaches.

Digital channels growing in importance

Covid-19 has clearly driven a move towards greater use of digital tools and technologies in the way that we work and the way that we communicate with each other. Through the Covid-19 crisis, the council has stepped up its communications and has utilised digital channels to communicate critical public health messages, however community feedback about the useability of the main website has been largely negative.

Pre Covid-19, the council's digital channels were predominantly utilised to support consultation efforts and the dissemination of information. There is a huge opportunity in what we have learnt about the potential of digital in communicating more effectively with the community. For example, moving council meetings online can potentially make them more open and accessible to Hounslow residents, and related to this there is an intention to move the Area Forums online this autumn as a possible means to increase participation.

"Many people don't want to go out to meetings in a town hall in the evening but logging on from your sofa and just listening in, is far more accessible" – Councillor.

However, while approaches utilising digital solutions have achieved more engagement, representation has been adversely impacted by the shift, which has presented new barriers to participation. The removal of barriers to using digital platforms and accessing online information, such as barriers to the affordability of broadband or technology that create a reliance on public spaces, disabilities which limit the ability to use computers or phones, lack of digital confidence and literacy, and the use of different languages, all need to be considered when viewing the future of digital methods of engagement within Hounslow.

To tackle this we would suggest that once social distancing rules allow meetings to be convened in person again, that a hybrid model is adopted to maintain this increased accessibility, whilst also developing approaches tailored to reach neighbourhoods and communities which are underrepresented or that face barriers to using digital technology.⁶

People often do not see consultations they have a vested interest in, resulting in decisions being made with limited input from the community. The council should examine how these consultations are communicated directly to various communities in a way in they are well received and understood.

⁶ In the case of consultations, while the council utilise Citizen Space and Commonplace as spaces to connect with the community, there are multiple instances of departments not using the consultation guidelines drawn up by the CPU to communicate their consultations through the correct channels, and using unfit platforms which are not suited to the consultation they are trying to carry out.

The Community Hub needs a digital presence where the community can contribute content

The Community Hub has played a vital role during the lockdown by supporting thousands of residents across the borough. The Hub offers an opportunity to reach a wider range of residents, and people the council wouldn't normally engage with. The Community Hub should seek to develop its digital presence as an access point for core services, however moving to digital does not mean putting badly designed or existing processes online. As part of developing this digital platform for the Community Hub, we would suggest developing it in a way that provides space for the community to share its own content, help shape the narrative of newsletters and bring forward examples of good practice happening locally.

"It's blindingly obvious, let's just give over some digital space for people to put stuff in, what's the worst that could happen" - Officer

Councillors need access to support in using digital technology to support engagement

New ways of utilising digital within the council could also be boosted and advanced by councillors embracing, using and supporting the technology introduced. Accessibility issues should also be factored in when considering how to build this into a councillor's role, and what equipment and support councillors may need to fully utilise new digital ways of working.

Truly effective engagement meets residents where they are

Given Hounslow's diverse and geographically dispersed neighbourhoods, people are more likely to identify with their local community or area than with Hounslow as a whole. Where approaches to engagement have been truly effective, they have been tailored to the group they aim to engage with, and met residents where they are (both literally and figuratively), matching tone and language to the situation and being sensitive to the distances people are willing to go to engage with the council.

Given the need for a tailored approach to engagement, and the identification of Hounslow's residents with their locality, building on and developing structures for engagement at a level people identify with, that address the issues they care about, could be key to creating a more comprehensive and deeply rooted structure for engagement across the borough.

Feedback on how engagement has influenced practice builds confidence and trust

LBH does not yet have a well-developed approach to sustaining communication with communities beyond the point where they have gathered feedback.

Our engagement with selected community members for this project has highlighted that feedback is not always provided to those who have participated in an engagement or consultation exercise, and the outcome of their participation, or

explanations on how views were taken into account in arriving at the final decision, are rarely shared. The lack of implementation of recommendations or clear communication as to how the council will act, means many residents feel disillusioned and unheard, and are less likely to engage in future.

Feeding back to those who have been engaged in a consultation or have taken the time to give their views is critical in building trust, sustaining engagement and deepening relationships with the community. LBH's 'Framework for informing, engaging and consulting residents and stakeholders'⁷ sets out why it is important that stakeholder interaction is fed back, highlighting its role in maintaining confidence and trust in the integrity of the involvement process.

In the development of Hounslow's Heatwave Preparedness Plan, officers engaged with residents who live in buildings most likely to be affected by high temperatures (high rise, south facing, with poor retrofitting, poor insulation, poor heat capacity etc), and held a number of successful community events, where strong ideas around engaging with local businesses were adopted, however there has been no follow up with those who engaged in the process to say how their ideas were used or what happened next.

Similarly, with the recent Climate Emergency Action Plan, the final version of the report for Cabinet included a summary table detailing how community feedback had changed the report, however this has not been communicated directly back to those people who were consulted, so they are likely unaware of how their voice has influenced the plan.

"People are just left high and dry" - Officer

More active communication is required so that local residents know that their views have been heard

After a consultation closes, a dedicated page on the council's website is updated to say what action was taken, however this is not consistently done, and often places an expectation on the consultee to seek out this information. There is a need to be more active in communicating to local residents that their views have been heard, explaining what changes LBH has implemented as a result.

Local residents also highlighted a desire for the council to be more transparent in communicating when decisions go against public opinion, and that they would like to see increased transparency about the reasons and justifications behind such decisions. Our conversations with members of the public highlighted that local people already have a clear understanding of the pressures the council is under regarding issues such as resources and cost savings. It is strongly felt the council should be less reticent to share bad news and more concerned about fostering honest and open dialogue with its communities.

⁷ London Borough of Hounslow (2012). A Framework for Informing, engaging and consulting residents and stakeholders. See p14 for standard 6. [Read](#).

Need to learn from experience which methods result in the most effective forms of influence

By not systematically and routinely collating feedback, it makes it difficult to look across the council and see how community engagement has definitively shaped local services or strategies, also reducing the opportunity to reflect and learn which methods result in the most effective forms of influence. Across the council, teams need to collectively improve the way they learn from and share effective methods of engagement.

Summary

In a summary of the section on *Methods* we would suggest that moving forward:

- Methods for community engagement should be informed by intelligence and insight
- A movement towards methods of co-production can improve publicly valued outcomes and build more empowering relationships with the public.
- While digital channels are growing in importance and can increase participation, the digitally excluded must not be forgotten.
- Councillors need to be encouraged and supported to use new technologies for engagement.
- Truly effective engagement meets residents where they are, both literally and figuratively.
- More active communication is required so that local residents know that their views have been heard.
- There is a need to learn from experience which methods result in the most effective forms of influence.

2. What is good community engagement?

Good community engagement can be defined in many different ways depending on its function, with practice ranging from standard consultation, to co-production and codesign, to deliberative processes and participatory methods. At present LBH's definition of 'community engagement' is extremely broad, and the community perceive the council's approach to engagement branching from consultation, to direct communication with council officers, to the efficacy of the council's website.

Within the council's Thriving Communities Strategy two key elements of what 'good' should look like are apparent; "A strong and influential community voice", and "Everyone plays their part in the community". Based on these definitions and additional input from interviews and focus groups, LBH's engagement should focus on developing communities' voices, increasing their ability to influence and supporting them to take action in shaping their communities and the borough as a whole.

LBH's view of what good looks like

Practice

Good practice at LBH requires the resource and time to build relationships on communities' terms, with a willingness to take part in and act upon conversations which may be uncomfortable. These relationships should come from, and be an enabler for, ongoing conversations between the council and community, resulting in a better understanding of the locality, and the community's assets and needs. The development of relationships and firm foundations for ongoing engagement is often done by 'feeder' projects, such as Hounslow's Play Streets or Micro Gardens, or individual members of staff, which establish good connections with the community and build trust. Mechanisms and people who can 'bring people in' and foster connections are extremely important in establishing good community engagement.

For engagement to be meaningful when considering voice, it must be clearly connected to power or influence over a decision, rather than inputting into a process for which a decision has already been made. Where engagement happens that is not meaningful, this can have a detrimental impact on the relationships the council has with the community.

The attitude with which people approach engagement is crucial to its success. Good community engagement should have the community at its core, with a strong understanding across the council of the value and importance of LBH's relationship

with the community. People should be involved from the very start of a process to ensure that their input is meaningful and embedded within the council's approach to developing solutions/developing services/making big and small decisions.

Based in a comprehensive and practical understanding of the community, the council should aim to work with rather than 'do to' those involved. Using a tailored and flexible approach which values both soft and hard forms of engagement, removes barriers to participation including accounting for different languages, cultures, and ways of engaging. It is important to meet the community where they are, both physically and in terms of knowledge and understanding of a subject or issue, with effort from the council to ensure information is understandable, and that sufficient thought and preparation has been put into the method of engagement used.

This should be married with clear communication as to the purpose and consequences of a person's involvement. Transparency as to how the community's input is used in decision making, and why decisions are made, is viewed as very important in building trust between council and community, alongside good consistent two-way communication between council and community. Timeliness of feedback is also crucial (particularly in the case of time-sensitive input from the community) to ensure any and all input from the community can be used in a comprehensive and thoughtful way.

"It's about more than just consulting on a strategy; it's about helping people to shape what matters to them and engaging with them about those issues."
- Officer

Outcomes

Good community engagement should provoke action within LBH based on community feedback and should be a central part of decision-making. It should lead to a greater understanding of the community, increase the community's voice and influence within the council, and result in greater trust between community and council. All of these outcomes could be drawn from the suggested approach to good practice above.

Good community engagement should make a positive change within the community and be a foundation for people to move forward with confidence in their own voices and the ability to make change happen. It should enable civic pride, and result in more connected communities. These outcomes require a deeper understanding of how engagement can build resilience and confidence within communities. Approaches that create opportunities for greater participation in decision-making and place-shaping, and that are designed to value community knowledge, could be a means to build this element of the council's community engagement.

Going Further

Done well, community engagement can serve a democratic function, enabling communities to recognise the innate power and wisdom they hold and their ability to shape where they live. Critical to this is an approach which permits the questioning of pre-existing hierarchies of knowledge (whether technical knowledge or lived experience is more valued in decision-making), that provides opportunities for community ownership of decisions, and creates spaces for compromise. Also, given the need within Hounslow to build more tailored approaches to engagement which reach communities that do not traditionally engage with the council, it could be pertinent to try broader methods. Given the expected impact of Covid-19 on the borough, approaches to engagement which can foster action and potentially support the development of community initiatives (such as community businesses)⁸ could be investigated. There is an opportunity now to pilot and experiment with these different techniques, to truly find an approach which works for Hounslow.

⁸ Community businesses are an integral part of community wealth building. They are led by local people, are accountable to their community and that the profits they generate deliver positive local impact. Definitions and further information on community businesses are provided by Power to Change, an independent charitable trust that supports and develops community businesses in England: <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/what-is-community-business/>

3. Good practice examples

Viewing engagement as outlined above will necessitate a redefinition of the role of councillors, and an examination of new potential methods. These could include co-production, deliberative and participatory methods, and a deeper consideration of community development and organising. The examples outlined below have been selected to demonstrate what is possible, and the diversity of approaches which exist and could be experimented with in Hounslow, based on the need to build participation and voice.

Redefining the role of councillors: The 21st Century Councillor

Research from the University of Birmingham's Public Service Academy,⁹ the Action Research Collective Jam and Justice,¹⁰ and LGiU,¹¹ highlight the potential for a new approach to the role of councillors, adapting what is often seen as a traditional remit as a representative and advocate for the community, to fit with the needs of council and community in the 21st Century.

Councillors' roles are changing. Since the early 2000s they have been required to adapt due to a long list of challenges and changes, including perma-austerity, changing citizen expectations, new technologies, different scales of working (including combined authorities), and changing boundaries and organisation of public services at a local level. Their roles are therefore required to change in multifaceted ways, but in particular connection to citizen engagement and encouraging voice, influence and action, they are now being required to act as a catalyst (enabling citizens to do things themselves and having new conversations about what is possible), as entrepreneurs or innovators (working with citizens and partners to encourage local vitality and develop new solutions) and as orchestrators (brokering relationships, working with partners and developing new connections). All of these roles require a skillset different to that currently offered through training and development, with a clear need for connective, digital and reflective skills which were deemed essential to be effective as a 21st Century Councillor.

"Well, actually what's the purpose of a Local Authority? So, if it is just to deliver statutory services then we'd question why we did have all the democratic infrastructure in a way I think. But if it is genuinely about stewardship of place and ensuring a positive future for a place there's a whole different skill set needed around that." - Chief executive, metropolitan borough council.¹²

⁹ C. Mangan et al (2016). The 21st Century Councillor. University of Birmingham. [Read](#).

¹⁰ Jam and Justice and North West Employers (2018). Testing the 21st century councillor framework. [Read](#).

¹¹ J. Glover (2017). Community Collaboration: A Councillor's Guide. LGiU and Local Trust. [Read](#).

¹² C. Mangan et al (2016). The 21st Century Councillor. University of Birmingham. p.14.

The role of councillors in mobilising and collaborating with local communities is increasingly important. This is particularly the case given the cuts made to local government over the past ten years, the backdrop of rising demand for public services, and the need to address increasingly complex problems without councils having the resource they had previously.

Relations between councillors and citizens are still at the core of representative democracy, but councillors are also increasingly needed to enable citizens to work alongside them to develop new solutions to service design and delivery, and to provide support to self-organise where traditional delivery decreases.

21st century councillors are required to shift their way of thinking, and work in genuine collaboration. There are many practical examples of how councillors have achieved this in different local authorities across England within LGiU's report, however a significant challenge to this approach is that in many respects its uptake depends on the personality and approach of councillors. Providing sufficient resource and support to transition to this way of working and recognising where it is already being put into practice, would be helpful in considering how to advance this approach.

Challenging hierarchies of knowledge: Co-Production and Co-Design

Co-production is a process where 'citizens can play an active role in producing public goods and services of consequence to them'¹³ and is one key method of re-evaluating and challenging the value given to technical and lived experience in decision-making. In its most radical form, 'real co-production' has the potential to challenge damaging policies and promote genuinely user-led services.¹⁴ Transformative models of co-production include the people who use a service in all of its elements, from design to planning to delivery. This could be used as one way to build trust between the council and community and utilise the valuable reservoir of lived experience which exists within the borough.

With a focus on service design and delivery, co-production can have a tangible impact in shaping services towards becoming truly person-centred, and the process has the potential for empowerment, developing transformative agency among those who participate. However, this approach does not frequently address the deeper structural issues driving people to use services and should be viewed as a method to inform service design but not as a solution to underlying, deep-rooted inequalities. With principles that centre on creating equal power relationships, significant time and energy needs to be put into designing co-production processes. Constant critical reflective practice and dialogue is also necessary to develop processes that empower participants, challenging dominant power-relations and practices.

¹³ E. Ostrom (1996) referenced in M Farr (2017). Power dynamics and collaborative mechanisms in co-production and co-design processes. *Critical Social Policy*, 38(4), pp.624-644. [Read](#).

¹⁴ P. Beresford (2016) referenced in *ibid*.

Fulfilling Lives, National Programme

With local partnerships across 12 areas in England, running for 8 years (since 2014), the Fulfilling Lives (FL) programme has pioneered an approach to citizen involvement and systems change. The programme aims to better support those with entrenched needs not otherwise engaging with services. FL's approach has integrated lived experience into every level of their service design, delivery and governance, valuing the voices and contributions of "Experts by Experience".

The partnerships across the country have built their co-production in different ways, but "Experts by Experience" (EbE) are valued as equal voices in co-designing services, recruitment, service delivery and evaluation. In Birmingham EbE are part of the governance of the project and wrote the business plan for the scheme. Input from EbEs is central to the programme's work influencing local systems change, and there have been numerous stories of how connecting those with lived experience to decision makers has provoked unexpected changes.

Truly utilising and respecting the voices of those who have been let down by the system has enabled this programme to create a bespoke service suited to the needs and aspirations of those they work with, whilst also fostering greater empowerment. Their additional focus on systems change also shows efforts to address the structural barriers in place which block those experiencing multiple disadvantage from accessing support, and the project is designed to create sustainable change beyond the duration of its funding through targeted work in each of the 12 localities.

Creating space for compromise: Deliberative Democracy

Innovations promoting citizen participation in policy-making processes have been inextricably linked to the development of deliberative democracy.¹⁵ Deliberative democratic methods, such as citizens' assemblies, panels, juries and mini-publics, have come to the fore in recent years due to the perceived failure of traditional methods of decision-making around some of the most complex and pressing policy issues currently faced.

Deliberative democratic methods focus on assembling small but representative groups of citizens to participate in deep discussion, debate and planning, requiring participants to be well informed and to consider different perspectives in order to arrive at a public judgement about what can be agreed on. This differs from participatory democracy, where the aim is to achieve breadth of experience and build participation in all aspects of politics rather than focussing on a specific area.¹⁶

¹⁵ J Boswell and G Smith (2019). Designing Democratic Innovations as Deliberative Systems: The Ambitious Case of NHS Citizen. *Political Studies*, 86(3), pp.689-709. [Read](#).

¹⁶ OECD (2020). Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave. [Read](#).

Determining the best model of deliberation depends upon the problem which needs to be solved, with options such as G1000s,¹⁷ Citizens' Councils and Citizens' Panels alongside better known Citizens' Assemblies.

These processes should not be seen as a silver bullet, as there are many examples of processes which have been compromised due to constraints and limitations following deliberation. However, deliberative processes have been well used and there is a wealth of learning and insight which can be utilised to design a process fit for purpose. Deliberative processes have been shown to develop comprehensive and considered solutions to complex issues, balancing both technical and personal knowledge, and increasing the likelihood of individuals to participate in such processes again if given the option.

National Assembly for Wales, Citizens' Assembly

Taking place from Friday 19th July to Sunday 21st July 2019, the Welsh Citizens' Assembly was tasked with looking at the question "How can people in Wales shape their future through work of the National Assembly for Wales?".¹⁸ The Assembly was comprised of 60 people of 331 who expressed interest in attending following a civic lottery process, and were selected to accurately represent Wales' population aged 16 and over. Those who attended had the opportunity to hear expert evidence to inform discussion and debate, and then voted on what they believed to be the key challenges facing Wales, and on where the country was performing well. A core part of the Assembly's work was to examine how decision-makers at the National Assembly and citizens engage, and members used the weekend to explore ideas on new ways that the National Assembly could involve citizens.¹⁹

Overwhelmingly, over 90% of those who participated in the assembly said it had made them want to be more involved in other aspects of decision making, and more people felt more confident to engage in political decision making as a result of being involved in the assembly. The outcome of the Citizens' Assembly is being used to inform the work of the Welsh National Assembly, and not only shows that members of the public are able to make nuanced, representative decisions, but that the experience increases their motivation to take part in further decision making and democratic processes. This challenges the reliance on traditional approaches to complex decision-making and highlights the value of utilising different forms of experience and knowledge aside from technical expertise.

Shared ownership of ideas and decisions: Participatory Budgeting

Participatory methods have gained ground since the 1960s, when they came to prominence through activist movements which demanded greater participation in government decision making (e.g. the civil rights movement). A core principle of participatory methods is that they must increase the capacity of citizens to

¹⁷ For more information on the G1000 approach see: <http://www.g1000.org/en/>

¹⁸ Involve (2019). National Assembly for Wales – Citizen's Assembly Full Report. [Read](#).

¹⁹ Welsh Parliament (2019). Wales' first Citizens' Assembly reports back. [Read](#).

participate in decision-making, which has required democratic institutions to change in order to make participation more meaningful.²⁰ Some methods, such as participatory budgeting and participatory planning, have become particularly popular among progressive municipalities hoping to shape their places in partnership with the community.

Participatory Budgeting, New York City

Participatory budgeting has been in place in New York City (NYC) since 2011, with four council members launching a process allowing residents to decide the allocation of some of their capital discretionary funds. This process has now expanded and includes the majority of council members, and the community now has decision-making power over more than \$35 million. The budget funds physical infrastructure projects which benefit the public, cost at least \$50,000 and have a lifespan of at least 5 years.

To determine how the budget is spent, ideas are brainstormed at neighbourhood assemblies (with over 6,000 residents participating in this process in 2014-15).²¹ Grassroots budget delegates (neighbourhood assembly participants who were particularly interested in staying engaged with the process throughout the cycle and volunteer their time)²² then research projects and decide what is put on the ballot paper. Proposals are then voted on by residents and the winning projects are funded (over 50,000 people turned out to vote on the ideas generated in 2014-15).²³ In NYC, voters in these processes are more likely than traditional voters to be low-income, people of colour, young or non-citizens. Participatory budgeting has created new parks, playgrounds and greenhouses in public housing developments, and engaged tens of thousands of people in participatory democracy who were previously uninvolved.²⁴

Trying out new techniques: building action in communities

Given the council's ambitions to provoke action within communities, and the desire to integrate the community into its recovery following Covid-19, approaches which enable more connectivity and action within communities should be considered. Methods such as community organising and those which broadly sit under the umbrella of community development could be investigated as a way of building social capital within communities, developing trust with the council, and deepening the council's understanding of, and connection to, communities.

These methods also have the potential to act as engagement strategies within communities which are not heard through traditional methods of engagement,

²⁰ C Pateman (2012) referenced in OECD (2020). Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave. [Read](#).

²¹ Urban Justice Centre Community Development Project (2015). A People's Budget: A Research and Evaluation Report on Participatory Budgeting in New York City. Cycle 4: Key Research Findings. p.3. [Read](#).

²² In other forms of participatory budgeting the delegates may be voted into a position.

²³ Urban Justice Centre Community Development Project (2015). A People's Budget: A Research and Evaluation Report on Participatory Budgeting in New York City. Cycle 4: Key Research Findings. p.1. [Read](#).

²⁴ Barcelona en Comu (2019). Fearless Cities: A Guide to the Global Municipalist Movement. p.88-89.

directly connecting engagement to tangible changes within their communities, led by the community.

USE-IT! Birmingham

USE-IT! was a three-year programme which aimed to pioneer innovative approaches to inclusive urban development in an area of persistent poverty and deprivation in inner city Birmingham. Seeking to both affect change on the ground and generate learning to inform broader system change, the programme had four streams of work which were designed to use an asset based approach to support the development of social enterprise within communities in areas of deprivation. . Crucial to the success of their approach (which resulted in the establishment of 40 community-owned businesses), was the building of trust and working *with* existing groups and organisations. Building connectivity between groups and individuals within the area enabled the development of a stronger sector, with people describing USE-IT! as ‘elevating’ informal community activities and helping those involved to develop an understanding of wide social innovation movements.

This project strengthened the architecture of the social and solidarity economy locally, and enabled people to go from *“doing things [in the community] as a hobby to changing the economy!”*²⁵. The project also focussed heavily on building relationships between the council and the community, for example working with local residents and organisations who could see the potential of land and buildings and addressing the barriers in place that prevented their effective use. In one case, this resulted in the development of places for a specific site, which includes expanded space and facilities for existing community organisations, the development of an eco-community centre and other environmental assets.

The programme was also seen as highly valuable in recognising the skills, experiences and activities of people living in neighbourhoods which are often defined by the level of material deprivation.

“If you find some way of recognising people in the first instance and getting them interested and following their own interests other things will start to follow... you have to start at a simple level with little projects that draw people in and find out what they can do and what they can bring to the party. USE-IT has given real substance to the idea of Asset Based Community Development” - Respondent comment from CLES (2019). Unlocking Social and Economic Innovation Together (USE-IT!) Evaluation report.

²⁵ CLES (2019). Unlocking Social and Economic Innovation Together (USE-IT!) Evaluation report.

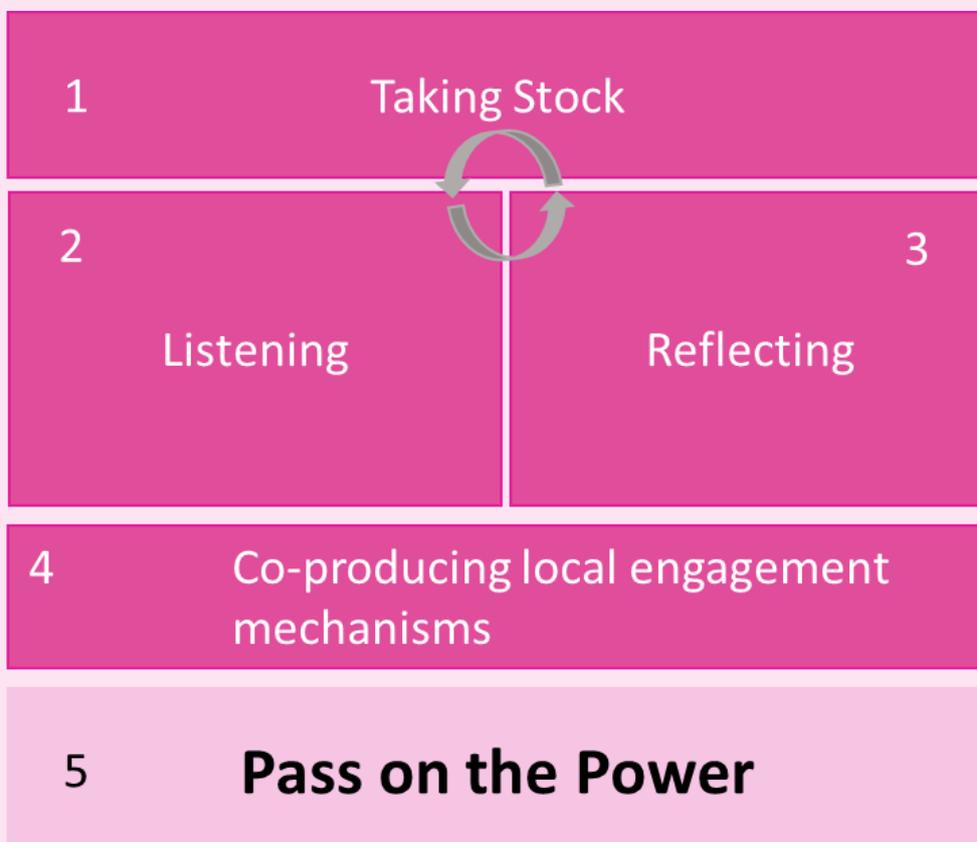
4. A way forward

It should be noted that throughout the consultation and review of this piece of research, LBH have been undertaking work to improve their understanding of engagement in Hounslow. As such, the following recommendations should be viewed in the context of work, which is already occurring, and which will be ongoing as part of the borough's recovery planning and beyond.

We have developed a 5 phased approach to 'Passing on the Power', one of LBH's newly developed and adopted "5 Values". Whilst the framework provides an overarching roadmap, there are some prescriptive suggestions outlined in the sections below. This roadmap is based on the findings outlined in the previous sections of this report and includes a number of case studies of good practice which have informed our thinking.

This final section of this paper is structured around a five-stage process, from taking stock to ultimately 'Passing on the Power', with recommendations built into each stage of the process.

Figure 1: A Way Forward



1. Taking stock

In our review of community engagement, we have found many examples of good practice and many individuals with a deep understanding of what good community engagement looks like. However, pre-Covid-19 there was a lack of strategic drive to connect these examples of good practice, knowledge and understanding with dedicated resource. While there are pockets of knowledge and understanding of local communities across council departments, this knowledge is not currently frequently shared or well understood. Local councillors and community partners who are closest to communities perhaps have the deepest insight about their needs, strengths and weaknesses, and since the outbreak of Covid-19, all have stepped up and stepped forward to support the local community.

Covid-19 has highlighted how important relationships with the local community are in supporting the management of the public health crisis we face, but also how vital the role of citizens will be in the rebuilding of an economy, one which is both more inclusive and addresses the challenges of climate change.

Recommendation: Community engagement requires a maintained high priority, with a dedicated lead within the Chief Executive's Department.

Recommendation: We suggest a short period of internal reflection within the council and with partners (e.g. Health partners where work is now well integrated) engaging officers, councillors and front-line delivery staff to try and answer the following questions:

- What do we know (and what don't we know) about our communities?
 - What insight do we already hold from current/previous consultation/engagement work?
 - What have we learnt from previous research around community engagement and how has this been used to date?
 - How do we understand 'neighbourhoods' across Hounslow?
 - How do we understand our communities of interest? E.g. Faith communities, communities with protected characteristics?
 - How well do we know our community and voluntary sector and the emerging mutual aid groups across Hounslow?²⁶
- Which approaches work well, where and why?
- Who holds relationships with community groups, community leaders and where can these be leveraged and where can they not?
 - What makes a local leader?
 - What do we know about local leaders?
 - Who are they, what is their sphere of influence?

²⁶ Rocket Science have been commissioned by LBH to complete a separate piece of work which explores this.

- What existing mechanisms do we have for sharing knowledge and understanding?

This approach could be built upon to create an iterative process of reflection and learning, (incorporating the listening and reflecting phases) underpinning ongoing work around engagement.

2. Listening

In our review, we found that LBH's understanding of its communities is predominantly based on traditional methods of engagement which are driven by the council, and which struggle to gain insight from the diversity of the borough. At present, LBH does not have much resource or sufficient mechanisms to engage with communities where they are (both physically and in terms of communities' understandings of council processes and language), and processes of engagement tend to lead with established mechanisms rather than the outcome they are seeking. LBH's understanding of community assets could be advanced, and there is a wealth of ideas and solutions which are ready to emerge from communities, but at present there is no clear way to communicate them to the council, and limited resource to act on them. It is also clear that Hounslow's residents identify more strongly with their local areas than with Hounslow as a whole.

Support 'communities' to have 'big local' conversations

The council could organise and facilitate 'big local' conversations (a listening exercise) across Hounslow, which could focus on multiple questions, such as:

- What role residents could play in shaping Hounslow's recovery, identifying their strengths and assets.
- How residents would like to engage with the council, and what would enable them to engage more meaningfully (including the identification of local assets, groups and people who can support connection to the community). This should include discussions with representatives from groups the council currently engages with to identify points for improvement (such as addressing processes which may be perceived as inflexible and a cause of disengagement).
- What key issues residents are experiencing locally, and what solutions they can think of to address them.
- How they might be able to be involved in shaping Hounslow going forward, with a loose connection to LBH's recovery planning and space for the development of quick local solutions which could be led by the community (with support if needed from local institutions, organisations and associated funding).
- How localities define themselves, which could help to shape the formation of engagement activities on a more localised level (particularly considering the "15 minute neighbourhood" idea below).

With a commitment to action from the council, this exercise should be accompanied with clear communication about its purpose and outcome, and transparency with the community regarding the process of engagement and how they will be communicated with about the outcome of the process. If this listening

exercise is carried out in person, it should fully utilise the resources, connections, groups and spaces available in local communities, based on information gathered in phase 1. However, given the ongoing challenges presented by Covid-19, consideration should also be given to how this exercise could be delivered online, or in a blended way.

LBH should design the 'big local' conversations in a way which will reach communities that are not usually represented within 'traditional' consultation exercises. This should be reflected in the chosen method applied within these sessions. Sessions could be delivered on a localised level and may require advertising at a micro-level to ensure residents are aware of the sessions and able to participate (see World Café example overleaf).

This localised process could help determine the shape of the community's role in Hounslow's post-Covid-19 recovery and create opportunities for social action. As such, the 'big local' conversations should be solution focussed when addressing local issues and create avenues for investigation and connection around specific issues to encourage action among residents and enable them to shape their local area. Covid-19 has demonstrated the desire of local people to get involved and support their local communities: There is significant good will and community spirit and, in a sense,, communities have already had experience in building these local structures in their response to the public health crisis.

Recommendation: Conduct a 'big local' listening exercise to collect a deep understanding of communities' needs, strengths and priorities.

Develop local leadership

LBH's Thriving Communities Strategy highlighted the council's ambition to nurture and develop community leaders to take an active role in supporting their communities. Nourishing and developing local leaders will be critical in developing the capacity of local people to play an active role in shaping the future of the borough.²⁷ Through the 'big local' listening exercise framed at a neighbourhood level, we would expect local people to emerge: Some may be unknown to the council, some may have been prompted by the growth of mutual aid groups to get more involved in their communities. We would suggest that identified active local residents with the potential to lead and organise in their communities are supported to develop their leadership skills with formal training/capacity building. Organisations such as Local Trust,²⁸ Clore,²⁹ Community Organisers UK³⁰ and Citizens UK³¹ all run structured programmes to develop community leaders, and these could be explored when they are provided in London or could be specifically commissioned to deliver a bespoke programme for Hounslow.

²⁷ London Borough of Hounslow (2019). Thriving Communities Strategy 2019-2023. p.22. [Read](#).

²⁸ Matt Leach (2019). Introducing the Community Leadership Academy. Local Trust. Viewed 02/10/2020. URL: <https://localtrust.org.uk/news-and-stories/blog/introducing-the-community-leadership-academy/>.

²⁹ Clore Social Leadership. Viewed 02/10/2020. URL: <https://www.cloresocialleadership.org.uk/>.

³⁰ Community Organisers. National Academy of Community Organising. Viewed 02/10/2020. URL: <https://www.corganisers.org.uk/training/>.

³¹ Citizens UK. Training in Community Leadership and Organising. Viewed 02/10/2020. URL: <https://www.citizensuk.org/training>.

Recommendation: Utilise the process of ‘big local’ conversations to identify and support emerging local leaders/organisers to take an ongoing role in the development of their community and local engagement structures.

World Café

World Café is a method of hosting large group conversations and has been used by groups nationally and internationally to have more meaningful groups conversations.³²

World Café is a process designed to take place in an informal setting (such as a café) to support ‘good conversation’. It works on the assumption that people already have the knowledge and creativity to tackle difficult challenges and is based on the principles that humans want to talk together about things that matter to them, and if they do, they can create collective power. It is best used to:

- Gather collective intelligence on experiences or ideas around an issue;
- Generate new ideas;
- Collaborate and build networks.

This method could be considered for LBH’s ‘big local’ conversations. More information about the strengths and weaknesses of World Café as a method (and its application) is available here.³³

Define local identities and geographies

As Hounslow’s residents identify more strongly with their localities than with Hounslow as a whole, as part of this process there is an opportunity to enable communities to self-define areas at a scale at which local residents feel most closely connected to. . This could be done by the council in partnership with residents, local leaders, the VCSE sector and other local networks. We expect local neighbourhood identity will vary, from single wards, to collections of wards to whole towns, and this lack of uniformity is to be encouraged rather than forcing a particular geographic level.

Covid-19 has encouraged greater thinking about how we rebuild our cities and societies so that they are more socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. Our suggestion would be that, working via councillors, with community and faith leaders, and working with the green recovery board who have already adopted this principle, that a ‘15 minute’ neighbourhood/town concept, (where people are able to meet most, if not all, of their needs within a short walk or bike

³² Numerous stories about the use of World Café are available at: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/category/stories-reports/>

³³ Involve. World Café. Viewed 02/10/2020. URL: <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods/world-cafe>.

ride from their homes), is overlaid on existing local identities. With the climate agenda requiring us to think and act more locally, and communities telling us they identify more strongly with their local neighbourhood it makes sense to align resident engagement at the same scale.

Recommendation: Working with local residents, councillors and the local community and voluntary sector, define communities at the scale at which local residents most closely identify.

Recommendation: Align with the Green Recovery board in their use of the 15-minute neighbourhood concept as a scale for resident engagement.

15-minute city

Building on the humanist view of Jane Jacobs, French Professor Carlos Moreno at the Sorbonne in Paris has helped to develop the concept of the '15 minute' city (*la ville du quart d'heure*) which focuses on proximity rather than mobility and building a new relationship between citizens and the rhythm of life in cities. The Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, unveiled her '15-minute city' plan in her recent re-election campaign. Building on the heritage of New Urbanism, which focuses on human-scaled urban design, these movements are focused on promoting citizen empowerment and participation.

Resource a social action micro-grant

As part of these 'big local' conversations community leaders and councillors should be provided with messages to share about the types of resources that are available to initiate small scale local projects. Bringing people together locally to elicit local priorities would potentially create opportunities for social action, and any process should be constructed to encourage and nourish this, seizing on opportunities to empower local people and sustain engagement. A 'big local' conversation may for example highlight shared concerns around a particular part of the neighbourhood where small environmental improvements would make a difference, or a collective interest or passion may emerge which would allow people to come together to respond to a shared concern quickly and allow the council to pass on power to local people.

Micro-grants can have multiple benefits in reaching 'hard to reach' people and grass-roots groups which are not generally eligible for grant funding, providing resource for groups and initiatives which otherwise go un-resourced or are volunteer/community-led. They could be considered as a way of establishing 'quick wins' following the sharing of potential solutions during the 'big local' conversations. They may also incorporate an element of participatory grant-making to ensure they're used in a way that benefits the community by involving the community in decision-making around their award. Consideration should be

given to how to make this fund accessible and known to groups in the borough that the council does not currently have a strong connection with.

Recommendation: Provide access to small grant resources to initiate social action, empower local people and demonstrate the value of their engagement.

3. Reflecting

In the listening phase (above) we would expect the council to begin to learn more about its local communities, start to understand where local energy exists among residents and where local leadership may emerge, as well as beginning to establish how people wish to be engaged in local issues, and the way in which they would like to be involved in influencing and shaping the direction of future development. The council needs to simultaneously reflect back with a reshaping of the authority so that it is fit to respond to community need: Building a culture where creativity and dynamism are encouraged will be key, particularly in moving forward and developing a new social contract with citizens. Building knowledge and understanding is a whole-organisation responsibility and all staff should be encouraged to build their understanding of communities.

At this stage it will be important to ensure the relationship between local leadership, engagement and local councillors is clarified, in order to develop a clearer picture of how localised engagement can be supported by councillors and other local leaders.

‘One Hounslow’ needs to have relationships with citizens and their communities at its heart

Moving forward, ‘One Hounslow’ needs to have relationships with citizens and their communities at its heart, and therefore corporate buy in to this agenda must begin to filter down throughout the organisation as it seeks to break down internal silos.

While a significant reform programme has addressed the internal operation of the council, this now needs to move on to the shaping of external relationships with the community, but also with wider anchor institutions. The recent work on reshaping the council Values should serve as a starting point for a shift towards becoming a place where the council and community work in partnership, which then serves as a point from which to develop the approach to engagement. This is an important decision to be made and widely acknowledged in corporate strategy, as it has clear ramifications for how a relationship with residents (and wider anchors) is developed, and how living the value of ‘Passing on the Power’ is pursued.

Recommendation: Build consensus internally on how One Hounslow will shift the relationships with citizens and their communities.

Make the most of the mix through recruitment/on-boarding

By focusing on local recruitment LBH has an opportunity to make the most of the local area, and to generate wealth within the borough, , helping to build a younger, more diverse workforce that could bring alternative perspectives and new ways of approaching the connection between council and community. This work is already being developed within the council. This approach to recruitment could be used to build the skills, capabilities and experiences needed within the council to ensure staff are able to effectively engage with Hounslow's communities. This could mean:

- Using the importance of community engagement as a selection criterion for all staff by incorporating the "5 Values" into application and selection processes.
- For roles where staff would be required to engage with the community, ensuring there is selection based on skills around engagement such as co-production or facilitation, and building and maintaining relationships in the community
- Including an overview of LBH's approach to engagement and expectations and basic good practice at induction stage for all staff.

To baseline this work, it would be helpful to conduct a staff skills audit to establish which skills already exist within the organisation, and which skills need to be supported and further developed to meet LBH's ambitions around engagement.

Recommendation: Examine recruitment practices with a view to attracting more local, and younger people to work for the council.

Recommendation: Build requirements around the 5 Values into recruitment, reflecting them in person and job specifications.

Rethink current internal resources

Having taken stock of the knowledge, skills and understanding of communities and community engagement, there is a need to rethink how existing resources and structures are utilised to deliver the strategic intent of the council, meeting the needs of, and building on the assets in the community as identified in phase 2. This could include a push towards better consultation and engagement, ensuring that it is viewed, prioritised and resourced in a way which reflects its importance within the council's strategy. The council could also consider how its partners in the community (such as community leaders and councillors) can support its ambitions around engagement, and how it can support these groups and individuals to have sufficient resources and skills to conduct engagement to the highest standards.

We are aware of an emerging "intelligence hub" with a strong focus on cross-departmental working and would suggest a dedicated cross-departmental working group (the Community Intelligence Hub) which brings together the Community Partnerships Unit, Behavioural Insights, Equalities and Communication. Going forward, this grouping could act as a resource for all departments to engage with

for advice and support in working with communities, including coordinating the initial insight gathered from the 'big local' conversations. This will require a review of data and intelligence sharing mechanisms and protocols to ensure compliance with GDPR regulations but may also require a review of any current/planned IT infrastructure and systems and system upgrades ensuring new systems are fit for purpose.

Realigning of existing resources will however need to be supported with additional resources: Building a new relationship with citizens will require genuine and sustained collaboration, which will require a cultural shift in how consultation and engagement is viewed, prioritised and therefore resourced. At present, the HRA funded engagement is seen as sufficiently resourced and could serve as a marker for scaling up investment in engagement within the council. Additional resource will not be effective alone, and internally, cultural shifts would be necessary to enable staff working on engagement to achieve the best outcomes and improve the relationship between council and community.

Working in partnership with communities and empowering them to work with the council as equals will take time and investment and should not be viewed as an opportunity to outsource responsibilities to local residents and councillors. Any engagement work taken on by residents and councillors should be supported through dedicated resource internally, to ensure it is done to the highest standard and where necessary seek professional insight into how to reach and listen to diverse communities. This shift in working will require new skills sets, which can be developed with training and experience or can be sought through future recruitment.

Recommendation: Develop a 'Community Intelligence Hub' as cross-departmental working group which brings together knowledge and understanding.

Recommendations: Review where data and intelligence sharing mechanisms and protocols prevent a building of shared knowledge and understanding.

Recommendation: Place a higher priority on social research, insight and intelligence gathering.

Recommendation: Collate and learn from experience which methods result in the most effective forms of resident influence.

Develop oversight functions

The Consultation Advisory Panel (CAP) needs to be strengthened so that it provides a more effective mechanism to challenge approaches that aren't inclusive enough or that do not encourage genuine engagement, influence and participation. It also needs to bring an increased level of accountability by ensuring feedback is shared with communities on how their input has been used and acted upon, and by requiring plain and honest reasons to be given in cases where resident feedback is not implemented. Investment in relationship building needs to be highly valued and protected, so the CAP should therefore hold an overarching view of team and departmental plans for community engagement, but also scrutinise resourcing

plans for engagement exercises to ensure colleagues are not developing overly ambitious plans, and are fully aware of their responsibilities in maintaining good relationships with Hounslow's communities (including exercising accountability with regards to effective communication about the outcome of residents' engagement).

This should be combined with a commitment from senior staff to using the central guidance and structures in place to manage consultation effectively, reinforced by staff training, and if possible any new allocation of resource should be connected to improving the use of these internal channels/supporting good consultation and the use of the CAP.

Recommendation: Oversight function to ensure consultation plans are sufficiently resourced (time/space)

Councillors take on a key role in engagement

Councillors can play a key role in helping to reshape engagement with the local community. Within this phase, the LBH could collaborate with councillors to develop ways to work with and support them to make the most of their deep local knowledge and connections with local communities.

As the roles of local councillors shift in response to Covid-19, the council could provide more formal support to help councillors focus their attention on amplifying the voice of local residents, enabling the community and on engaging as equal partners in the co-design of council policy.³⁴ Enabling councillors to execute their representative role so it adds value and support's 'One Hounslow's' ambitions will be critical.

"We need to enable them to bring their voices forward – this must be a basic building block of whatever we do" - Officer

As a starting point, councillors should be engaged in this period of reflection to review their role³⁵ in the context of recommendations taken forward to reshape local engagement mechanisms. As a starting point, existing research on the concept of a 21st Century Councillor could be shared with local councillors to develop ideas on how best to support them around engagement, and around how LBH can best harness councillor skills to strengthen connections with residents.³⁶

Recommendation: Councillors should be engaged in this period of reflection to redefine their role to amplify the voice of local residents, supporting them to engage with the council as equal partners in the co-design of council policy.

³⁴ One respondent through the co-production phase of these recommendations suggested potential "busmans holidays" to enable knowledge exchange between local government representatives (whether in the UK or abroad).

³⁵ London Borough of Hounslow. Local Elections 2018. Viewed 02/10/2020. URL: https://www.hounslow.gov.uk/info/20043/elections_and_voting/1369/local_elections_2018/5.

³⁶ C. Mangan et al (2016). The 21st Century Councillor. University of Birmingham. [Read.](#); also see section 3. Good practice examples - Redefining the role of councillors

4. Co-producing

Having listened to the community from where they are, and reflected organisationally how to reshape and realign, there should be the opportunity to build on the 'big local' conversations, which, allowed to evolve organically in neighbourhoods, can be supported to evolve and deepen. A way forward could be to develop mixed channels of engagement and investigate the potential of digital channels, alongside repurposing existing structures (e.g. Area Forums, Tenants' & Residents' Forums) and developing new ways of engaging with the community, closer to where they live. This should be paired with the creation of clear routes for community, voluntary and social action to emerge and develop within the community with support from the council and its partners.

Build out from the 'Community Hub' as platform to engage

Covid-19 has seen the development of the 'Community Hub' as effective model for engaging with the community and with local mutual aid groups. The 'Community Hub' has played a vital role during the lockdown by supporting thousands of residents across the borough. The 'Community Hub' is not a physical place as such, it has no fixed location: One afternoon it could be in Tesco in Chiswick, while it could be in the park in Feltham the next day. The 'Community Hub' concept serves as way for the council to join up its core offer and deliver this locally in increasingly innovative ways, with an underpinning drive to take the offer to people where they are. The development of the Community Hub so far, in the form of the Community Solutions Model, has a strong focus on service delivery. However, the Community Engagement Team were well suited to the triage work done by the Hub, and it may be beneficial to revisit the Community Solutions Model and build in elements of engagement work to complement its other functions.

Local neighbourhood structures can evolve to support and connect with this concept of a 'Community Hub'. Locally defined neighbourhoods can feed into and access this 'Hub', and Community Intelligence should sit at the heart of this model. In addition, to ensure the development of mixed channels for engagement, a digital platform could be developed for the Community Hub, and we would suggest developing it in a way that provides space for the community to share its own content, help shape the narrative of newsletters and bring forward examples of good practice happening in communities.

Recommendation: Build out from the Community Hub to reach into local neighbourhoods, connecting with local identities.

Redefined and realigned: Area Forum to Neighbourhood Hub

To develop structures that really work for the community, existing mechanisms for engagement could be re-imagined or created to have a strong focus upon the areas that people identify with. Their format and purpose could be co-designed with the community to reflect local priorities, people, cultures and ways of working. They could focus on gathering insight and supporting action within the community, enabling the co-production of local solutions and creating avenues for deeper

engagement and better consultation. The community could also take a role in leading these mechanisms.

Hounslow's Area Forums were one structure that was widely critiqued as bureaucratic and old fashioned through this review; however, they do serve an important local democratic function. Many of the scrutiny and oversight functions of the Area Forums could be transferred to a new model of 'Neighbourhood Hubs', with the Area Forum re-defined and realigned to match local identities. Another structure which could be examined and reshaped would be Residents' Forums.

Working with local communities following the 'big local' conversation, communities could shape these mechanisms to reflect local priorities, local people, local cultures and local ways of working. This would break down the formality of the Area Forum model and allow more people to participate on their own terms, in a structure which they have a say in shaping.

A Neighbourhood Hub could flip the focus of the Area Forum from the dissemination of information to the gathering of insight. Focus could be given to using the Hubs as spaces to co-design policy, working to create trust, and for the council to work in partnership with the community. This will require a different set of skills, to enable and encourage creative facilitation and inclusive conversations, which will go beyond the traditional view of 'chairing' meetings.

Determining the role of councillors and other local leaders within these structures will be important. It may be that residents who have taken on a leadership role in their community wish to co-chair, or even lead, these new structures, and the council should be prepared to provide support for however they choose to take the running of such structures forward. Councillors should be enabled to focus more on amplifying local voices, ensuring that this influences policy design and internal changes within the council, and on facilitating and supporting action in communities from the ground up. This will necessitate a clear mechanism for councillors to feedback information they hear from the community, and the ability to use their internal knowledge to support residents hoping to take action locally.

Recommendation: Redefine Area Forum footprint to a 'Neighbourhood Hub' concept.

Recommendation: Provide space for local leaders to take a leadership role in new structures.

Barcelona En Comú, Neighbourhood Groups and Coordinators

The new Neighbourhood Hubs could take a similar shape to the Neighbourhood Groups formed by Barcelona en Comú (BenC), a municipalist platform which won the city elections in May 2015, based on a manifesto drawn together through citizen participation. Their structure during the electoral campaign included the creation and active participation of citizens in 10 Neighbourhood Groups.³⁷ These groups were neighbourhood or district assemblies where all residents who wished to could participate, based on the principles of the feminization of politics.

The Neighbourhood Groups' focus was to involve citizens, spread word about BenC, evaluate the situation in the neighbourhood and its effect on local communities, and to connect with local groups which could offer knowledge and experience relating to the neighbourhood. They were connected to the broader structure of BenC via Neighbourhood Coordinators; spaces in which two representatives from each Neighbourhood Group would attend, and which acted as a bridge between the territorial groups and the central organising groups.

This structure gathered a huge amount of local insight and enabled BenC to develop a manifesto deeply rooted in the experiences of those living within the city due to the value they placed on connection and listening across different territories and experiences.

Develop Community Hub > Neighbourhood Hub communication

Connectivity between the Community Hub and the Neighbourhood Hubs would allow a flow of information in both directions. A shared digital platform, interwoven with existing comms activities (e.g. Hounslow Voice) would allow the community to shape the narrative, highlight local initiatives and stimulate greater social action and engagement at a local level. The Community Intelligence Hub (as described in *"Rethinking current internal resources"*), would be responsible for this shared platform and could utilise this new tool to continue to build local intelligence and insight, so that consultation and engagement are better conceived and plans for co-design more achievable.

While digital needs to be central, as it allows reach to be expanded, it cannot be the only channel used to engage with the community. For some people in the borough, digital methods of engagement present a barrier, particularly for those who cannot

³⁷ Barcelona en Comú (2016). How to win back the city en Comú: A guide to building a citizen municipal platform. p8-9. [Read](#).

afford the technology or are not technologically literate. To address this, the council are considering other ways they can reach these groups through the 'Community Hub'. This practice should be shared at a neighbourhood level, co-ordinating resources wherever practical. If the Neighbourhood Hubs are viewed as an extension of the 'Community Hub' this will happen naturally.

As digital is an increasing force within our day to day lives, the council should also consider how it aligns its broader programme of digital inclusion work within the borough to upskill those who are not confident with, or do not have access to, IT and the internet.

Recommendation: Build a digital presence for the Community Hub with equal prominence to paying council tax, applying for a permit or licence, or making a complaint, and in a way that provides space for the community to share its own content, help shape the narrative of newsletters and bring forward examples of good practice happening in communities.

Recommendation: Increase use of local media (e.g. radio) and social media channels (e.g. You Tube/Snapchat)

Recommendation: Councillors need to be encouraged and supported to use new technologies for engagement.

Facilitate social action

Neighbourhood Hubs could become a focus for the more formal VCSE and the emerging landscape of mutual aid groups to interact, work collaboratively, engage a wider group of local people and amplify local social outcomes. These groups bring with them their reach and provide hooks for citizens to get involved and become active where they can see they can have an influence. In many respects this is happening anyway; Covid-19 has seen a bypassing of traditional mechanisms, with local people coming together to initiate action, and this needs to be nourished and supported in a way that is fully inclusive of all communities.

LBH should consider creating a dedicated pot of funding to facilitate social action (such as volunteering, activism, and supporting or developing community businesses etc.) on a very local level where residents have expressed popular support for the idea (similar to the way that Better Reykjavik utilises its digital platform to crowdsource and promote ideas – see the case study overleaf).

These initiatives, which should focus on solutions that have been co-designed within the community and Neighbourhood Hubs may be encouraged to work together on shared priorities and projects, with an intent/option to pilot local programmes which could then be adopted across the borough. Participatory budgeting could be integrated as part of this, ensuring residents have a say in how the money is spent.

Recommendation: Develop a formal funding mechanism to support neighbourhood level social action.

Better Reykjavik Digital Platform

A leading example of digital innovation in government, Better Reykjavik was produced by the Citizens Foundation with Reykjavik City Council, and launched in May 2010.³⁸ It was designed to create opportunities for residents to submit original ideas and solutions to municipal-level issues within the city, with space to vocalize, debate and prioritize proposals and ideas. Broadly, its purpose focusses on agenda setting, participatory budgeting and policy crowdsourcing.

As one of the most successful digital platforms for engagement in the world, it has been used to facilitate a variety of projects, including the crowdsourcing of education policy in 2017. This generated almost 200 ideas and thousands of debate points. The platform's success is in many ways based on a unique debate system, which enables users to add talking points and arguments for or against ideas rather than the usual ability to comment which can result in arguments and name calling (which often enables the expression of extreme views). It was also possible to record audio and video to submit ideas or debate points, which attracted users who may not otherwise participate.

The platform is so highly regarded that its adoption has spread, and it is now being used in Madrid and Dundee, building evidence of its applicability in different contexts.³⁹

5. Passing on the power

Genuinely listening to the community, reflecting this within the 'One Hounslow' programme of reform and co-producing local engagement mechanisms would lay the ground for a genuine passing on of the power. As we move forward, and as the public health crisis slows, a series of further challenges are going to develop. The social, economic and environmental outcomes of this crisis have not yet made themselves clear, but we do know that how they play out will be different in different places within the borough.

Shifting to a neighbourhood level and delivering engagement in partnership with the community, a move away from formal to mixed channel engagement, and creating clear routes for community, voluntary and social action should allow for a greater diversity of voice to emerge. We do have to recognise that this represents a significant shift from where the council currently is and may take years of work and investment to develop as intended.

³⁸ Observatory of Public Sector Innovation. Better Reykjavik. Viewed 02/10/2020. URL: <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/better-reykjavik/>.

³⁹ Dundee Decides. Viewed 02/10/2020. URL: <https://www.dundeedecides.org/>.

To build and embed approaches to 'Passing on the Power' in Hounslow, the council could investigate and develop methods of engagement where a degree of decision making is devolved to citizens. Examples of this include participatory budgeting, participatory grant-making, and participatory planning, alongside deliberative democratic methods which could create more inclusive and representative opportunities for communities to engage and shape decisions. Building a more participatory way of working will require sufficient resource, and collaboration with community stakeholders to ensure whatever is developed will work for the community.

Investigate collaborative methods to generate solutions

Co-production and co-design are two such methods which have had extensive use in the public sector to date, placing value on experiential knowledge alongside professional knowledge. These methods can improve publicly valued outcomes and build more empowering relationships with the public. Other methods may include participatory budgeting, planning and grant-making (as detailed above and in 3. *Good Practice Examples*). Utilising such methods would enhance the shift to a neighbourhood level and delivering engagement in partnership with the community, creating clear ways for the public to inform areas, such as service and project design in partnership with the council through the Neighbourhood Hubs.

Specific methods for community engagement should be informed by intelligence and insight but opening up a space to test and trial collaborative methods such as co-production and co-design will require groundwork in order to identify the most appropriate way to apply different engagement methods. We do recognise that this represents a significant shift and may take considerable time to develop as intended. Other methods of collaborative work that could be investigated as the shift in engagement progresses, could include developing approaches with other local anchors or supporting the development of projects which would enhance residents' capacity to act to improve the borough.⁴⁰

Recommendation: Explore co-production and co-design approaches which can support a deepening of the value of 'Passing on the Power'.

Recommendation: Share examples of collaborative approaches with residents so that they can build an understanding of how they work in practice.

Build a 'One Hounslow' citizen deliberation process

The term "citizens' panel" has emerged as an umbrella term for a range of organised citizen deliberation practices which have spread around the globe and become a ready-made option for enhancing public participation.

Negotiating designs and procedures for citizen deliberation and its role within democracy is however not an apolitical or non-technical process. The forms and processes for political decision-making will be defined by the voices heard and the degree of democratic legitimacy that they can claim. We therefore do not wish to

⁴⁰ Every One Every Day in Barking and Dagenham is one such example of a project which is enabling local communities to connect and take action. More information here: <https://www.weareeveryone.org/tomorrowtoday>.

be prescriptive about the design of any organised citizen deliberation practices, we seek to share only our view on why we think such process would have value.

We would propose using some form of organised design and procedure to strive for representativeness on an issue as important as shaping 'One Hounslow'. Sampling methods can be employed to reach out to a representative section of the local population, and while it will never be perfect, it does ensure a wider voice than self-selection methods. Using the insight and relationships developed through the 'big local' conversations and co-production of new engagement structures could enhance and promote this initiative and encourage responses from groups who have to date been poorly represented. This is as a supplement, and to stand alongside, a more organic flourishing of local level democracy which we know will take time to develop, acknowledging that in the face of a pandemic, the (potentially) worst recession we have faced for 300 years and the shortening timeframe in which we have to address climate change, that we need to move forward together now.

We are aware that LBH needs to work harder to understand the diversity of its communities and extend its reach to those who have not traditionally engaged with the council. We therefore view a form of organised citizen deliberation as a way to address the lack of diversity of voice in the immediate term, while also allowing that diversity to emerge organically through the nurturing and development of community leadership and authentic relationships with the wide range of communities in the borough.

There are a range of perspectives on the role of organised citizen deliberation which are shaped by views of how the public should or should not reach consensus. Jurgen Habermass (1995) promotes the ideal of rational consensus, arguing that organised citizen deliberation methods should seek to achieve a consensus about issues through rational arguments. John Dewey⁴¹, the influential political philosopher, social and educational reformer however acknowledges a pluralism among various societal perspectives. In this view, organised citizen deliberation should seek to mediate and reflect diverse positions, existing controversies and conflicts in order to enable collective learning. Chantal Mouffe,⁴² a prominent critic of deliberative democracy on the other hand states that there is no such thing as a single cohesive "public" that can be described by common norms or rationalities. Instead, society is seen as a constellation of power and the objective of organised citizen deliberation is to reveal societal power structures and the empowerment of the marginalised.

We would lean towards Dewey's conceptualisation and would suggest working with local community leaders who begin to emerge, to design a form of organised citizen deliberation that respects diverse positions and does not seek to force consensus. Where ultimately the council must make a decision, it must also explain how it has considered alternative views and arrived at its decision.

Alongside this, which we have assumed would look like some form of citizen panel, we suggest building a wrap-around programme of skills development and support

⁴¹ J. Dewey (1954). *The Public & Its Problems*. Athens: Swallow Press.

⁴² C. Mouffe (1999). *Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism?* *Social Research*, 66(3), pp.745-758.

for residents engaging in the process to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship between the council and those attending; avoiding the 'use' of the community as a means of gathering information without offering something in return. This may include an introduction to forms of deliberative democracy, an understanding of how the council operates and functions, along with training in facilitation and co-production. However, again, the form this takes should be discussed with the community to ensure it truly reflects what they would hope to gain from involvement in the process.

Measures should be taken to ensure people who may only be able to attend with childcare or who would experience an impact on their work patterns are also considered, with any invitation to participate being clear on what the expectations are of participants, the panel's timeline, and measures in place to enable people to engage with the process.

Recommendation: Explore deliberative democracy models which can support a deepening of the value of 'Passing on the Power'.

Recommendation: Share examples of good practice in the use of deliberative democracy models with residents so that they can build an understanding of how these work in practice.

Recommendation: Explore a form of organised citizen deliberation as a way to address the lack of diversity of voice in the immediate term (see example of the "Ostbelgien Model" over leaf).

Hold a One Hounslow Summit/Assembly

The challenges we face as a society will not be overcome by any single actor, institution or sector. It is through connections and collaboration that we will be able to begin to develop the solutions to the problems we face. 'One Hounslow' is a clear response to this challenge.

While we have argued the 'One Hounslow' programme of reform needs to place citizens at its heart, it also needs to consider approaches which connect actors from across the public, social and commercial sectors. To develop a truly 'One Hounslow' approach, the wider anchor institutions of its place need to be brought together in a form of collaboration that leverages on the power, assets and resources of all key actors.

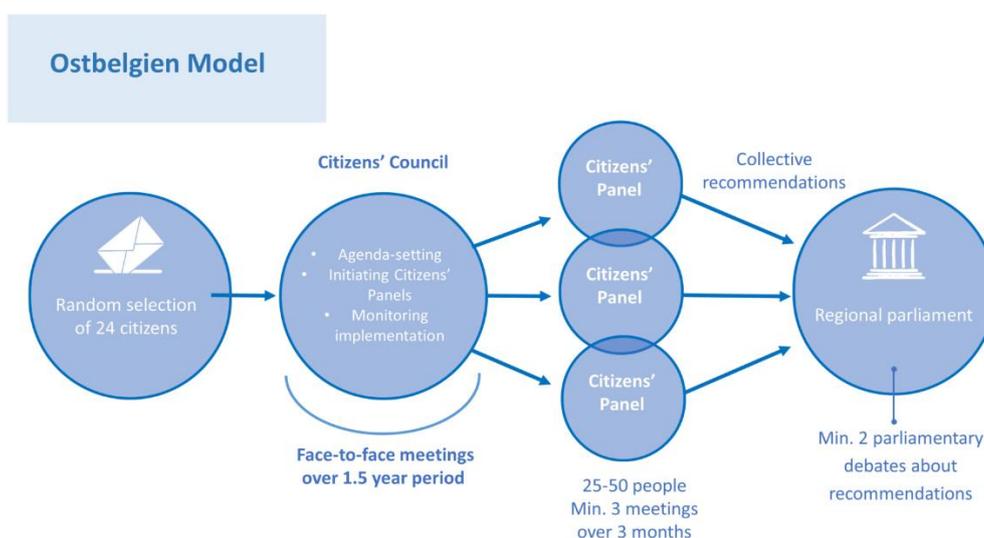
We believe that at its heart, 'One Hounslow' is seeking to build a new local social contract and build a good society:⁴³ One where the commercial sector brings exchange and wealth creation, a public sector and local state which promote equality and a degree of redistribution - providing some public goods and services which are not provided by the market - and a social sector which brings civic ties and social diversity, imbued with reciprocity and solidarity.

⁴³ Neil McInroy (2016). Forging a Good Local Society: Tackling Poverty Through a Local Economic Reset. Centre for Local Economic Strategies and The Webb Memorial Trust. [Read](#).

The “Ostbelgien Model”

This model, which has been designed to serve the community of Ostbelgien in Belgium, is going to create a dual structure of a permanent Citizens’ Council and Assembly which will sit in tandem with the regional parliament. It has stemmed from the [G1000](#) process pioneered by David Van Reybrouck.

The model, in place since September 2019, is based on the participation of citizens in a permanent Citizens’ Council and temporary Citizens’ Assemblies or Panels. The Council consists of 24 people who take on this responsibility for 18 months (the timing of which aims to avoid parliament-like long terms and give the opportunity to every Ostbelgian to take part in the institution). Its jobs are to set the agenda of, and to initiate, citizens’ panels on specific topics. Recommendations from the Panels are then put to the regional parliament which must debate with them.



44

While this model is different and innovative, there are some pitfalls in its approach as recommendations are not legally binding. However, it does begin to address the problem of legitimacy being experienced not only in local government but in national and international democracy, and creates regional spaces for compromise and debate between citizens and politicians.⁴⁵ There are also many other methods and examples of embedded deliberative processes, which could be used to investigate a long-term approach to deliberation within Hounslow.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ International Observatory on Participatory Democracy. The Ostbelgien Model: a long-term Citizens’ Council combined with short-term Citizens’ Assemblies. Viewed 02/10/2020. URL: <https://oidp.net/en/practice.php?id=1237>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ City of Kingston. Ward Committees. Viewed 02/10/2020. URL: <https://www.kingston.vic.gov.au/Community/Community-Groups-and-Networks/Committees-and-Networks/Ward-Committees>; Toronto Planning Review Panel. Viewed 02/10/2020. URL: <https://www.toronto.ca/city->

While there is work to be done in extending the 'One Hounslow' concept to its relationship with citizens, there is equal work to be done in extending this concept to wider public sector anchor institutions and the commercial sector. We would propose a form of summit which brings people together, with the use of sortation (the random selection of residents) to bring together the citizen representation. There are successful, working examples of this approach in practice. For example, Ireland is the most well-known example of the use of citizen assemblies in recent times, with the first experiment pulling together 33 politicians and 66 citizens to develop recommendations for how to overhaul Ireland's constitution. The National Assembly for Wales also held a Citizens' Assembly in the summer of 2019 to answer the question "How can people in Wales shape their future through the work of the National Assembly for Wales?". Further information about this example of good practice, and deliberative democratic methods, is within section 3 of this report.

Such a summit/assembly mix could be utilised to develop a new social contract between the people of Hounslow, allowing parties to collaboratively develop how 'One Hounslow' works in practice, and how collectively and in collaboration, Hounslow is going to address the big challenges of building a more inclusive and low carbon economy.

Recommendation: Develop a 'One Hounslow' summit to build a new local social contract, to collectively address the big challenges of building a more inclusive and low carbon economy.

Recommendation: Sustain a 'One Hounslow' anchor partnership that brings public, private and social sectors together to deliver a future which meets local ambition.

[government/planning-development/outreach-engagement/toronto-planning-review-panel/](https://www.co-val.eu/case-studies/blog/project/observatory-of-the-city-case-study/); CoVal Repository. Observatory of the City. Viewed 02/10/2020. URL: <https://www.co-val.eu/case-studies/blog/project/observatory-of-the-city-case-study/>.

Appendix 1 – Methodology

The methodological approach to this research was adapted over time to suit the needs of LBH and what was asked of this research. What has been produced is:

- A review of the council's approach to engagement, including analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the council's approach and recommendations relating to culture, knowledge and understanding, approach and methods around LBH's community engagement.
- An outline of what 'good' looks like; both within the thoughts of those involved in this work and more broadly.
- Examples of good practice which could inform future work based on the needs of the council and characteristics of the area.
- A recommendations paper which has been co-produced with the community, officers and members who participated in this work.

Desk research

CLES reviewed key policies and strategies to determine overarching community engagement approaches within LBH. The documents reviewed were:

- A Framework for informing, engaging and consulting residents and stakeholders. (September 2016)
- Consultation Advisory Panel – Terms of Reference
- Consultation Charter
- Consultation Plan Template
- Five Values that drive us (March 2020)
- M·E·L Research, "Resident Engagement Workshops" (February 2018)
- Hounslow Data Pack (June 2020)
- Agenda item for Cabinet - "Leading Hounslow" (11th June 2019)
- Agenda item for Cabinet - "Coronavirus (COVID-19) – response and recovery" (9th June 2020)
- London Borough of Hounslow Corporate Plan (2019-2024)
- London Borough of Hounslow Thriving Communities Strategy (2019-2023)
- BMG Research, "Hounslow Residents Survey, 2014" (November 2014)
- London Borough of Hounslow Residents Survey 2016 (December 2016)
- BMG Research, "Residents Survey 2018" (January 2019)

This was a high-level review to identify potential gaps and avenues for development within LBH's approach. CLES used insight from this review to inform an understanding of the council's ambitions and what 'good' looks like to inform the Way Forward paper. CLES utilised data and examples from within these documents to evidence LBH's use of intelligence and insight from engagement activity.

Consultation

CLES conducted structured group interviews with 18 people over the course of a week (23rd July - 28th July 2020) via Teams. Two larger group sessions were then held with council officers involved in community engagement (10 attendees, 31st July), and councillors who were chairs of local Area Forums (6 attendees, 10th August).

Two online focus groups were held with the community to gain an external perspective on the council's community engagement practices (7 attendees, 4th August, 6 attendees, 13th August). All attendees of the focus groups were then invited to Basecamp (an online platform) to review the notes of the session in preparation for using the platform to review the proposed 'Way Forward'.

Development of 'what good looks like'

Specific questions were asked within the smaller group interviews to glean information about examples of good practice and the principles that were viewed as essential to good community engagement. This was complemented by observations integrated from the broader interviews, themes and ideas suggested by other participants in this research, and LBH's ambitions as identified through interviews and the desk-based review.

CLES reviewed grey literature to build a clear picture of good practice in relation to the specific challenges Hounslow faces and the benefits of a range of approaches. These were used to inform the suggested avenues for investigation when considering LBH's approach moving forward.

Co-production of recommendations

Insight from CLES's consultation, notions of what good practice looks like, and examples of good practice nationally and internationally were used as a basis for the presentation of a summary slide-deck which was shared with consultees via Basecamp. We received responses from 11 residents, officers and councillors. The slide deck was paired with a set of questions which we asked participants to answer.

CLES used the responses to inform the 'Way Forward' paper, integrating the feedback received.



Appendix 2 - Examples of good practice within Hounslow

Consultation:

London Borough of Hounslow's "5 Values"

Consultation around the council's "5 Values" was very effective, with 80% of LBH staff engaged. Using a mixture of methods, including a staff survey, World Cafés and Conversation Hubs, LBH succeeded in having a whole-organisation conversation. Learning from this scale of conversation could be used to inform approaches to a borough-wide conversation, and future consultation exercises.

Climate Emergency Action Plan

The consultation work around the Climate Emergency Action Plan is a good example of how listening to the community and building them into the process of designing solutions can result in robust and informed outcomes. The [Environmental Strategy] Team involved residents in the process of designing the Action Plan from the beginning, running two community events and building in the voices of young people by distributing a survey promoted via connections with local primary and secondary schools. This required significant time and effort and highlights the importance of giving sufficient time to developing engagement approaches and using appropriate communication channels. The feedback gathered allowed the council to propose actions which would otherwise have been seen as too ambitious, with pressure from the community who were involved, which keeps the Action Plan's implementation accountable. Commitment from councillors and officers to implement the plan, and the transparency with which this process has been conducted, has led to increased trust between those who fed into the consultation (between 350 and 400 people) and the council.

Stemming from this process, this work has also seen the development, of a Climate and Clean Air Community Reference Group, which will be part of the governance of the Action Plan. Designed to increase transparency, this approach to co-governance is a step in the right direction and aligns with many of the principles of good practice outlined in Section 2.

Engagement:

The Community Partnerships Unit has used many effective and innovative methods of engaging the community and takes an intuitive approach to engagement rather than adhering to specific frameworks or approaches. These examples frame ways to provoke action within communities which have already been proven to work within Hounslow, and the council should utilise the learning and good practice that have been identified as a result.

Volunteer Estate Inspectors

This project built up a base of volunteers (tenants and leaseholders) and gave them the tools and training they needed to inspect their local estate, complementing inspections done by Housing

Officers roughly every 6 months. Two months after the Housing Officer has made a visit, the volunteers also inspect the estate to check whether improvements/repairs have been made and if there are other issues to report. Volunteers write a report which is the same as a Housing Officer's report, and it is treated in the same way by the Housing Team and is often felt to have more effect in pushing for action based on issues on the estate. The volunteers have fed back that they feel valued and heard, and that they have a real impact in their community., These reports are now also forming part of the monthly reports developed by the Housing Team due to their quality and significance in provoking change.

Playstreets

The Playstreets scheme has been shown to have tangible impacts in the local community. For example, Cromwell Road in Feltham runs a Playstreet as part of the project every month, come rain or shine. Since being involved, the people who have led on the Playstreet have also , set up the Tenants' & Residents' Association. The Playstreets scheme has therefore provoked a broader increase in community action which has led to a connection across workstreams within the council, creating a more active community.

DIY in Council Properties

To cut down on requests for maintenance, the top 5 repair requests from tenants in council properties, which within their contract they were obliged to do themselves, were identified. A member of staff from the CPU team then worked with the council's repair contractors, who then delivered workshops on estates relating to those repairs. This scheme was interrupted by Covid-19, but a solution was developed, the firm are now producing instructional videos. Webinars are also being considered: These would work by circulating a list of materials needed to participate in the webinar, and sending the materials out to those people that need them The webinars would be live, allowing people to participate in real time, so that the progress of the project is not lost. The scheme costs are very small as running the scheme aligns with the contractors' CSR targets. This shows how effective targeted engagement can be in reducing the resource needed to address issues, as well as how to address problems using local insight, and how to work around budget issues in establishing effective and useful work with the community.

Feltham Green and Pond: Now and Next

With support from Studio Weave/00 LBH experimented with using different approaches to meaningfully involving people in place-shaping and planning decisions. This was done on Feltham Green, experimenting with new seating. People were encouraged to come to the site and experiment using stackable crates, and were encouraged to think about how different seating could look Residents were also encouraged to interact with picture boards showing different types of paving and landscaping, and children were given the opportunity to use plasticine to model things they would like to see on site.

LBH has already tried some more innovative approaches to engagement, but this is not the norm across the council and isn't well understood outside of the CPU and a small number of other teams.

Broader work within the community:

Conference: Supporting Hounslow Residents with Sight Loss

Over 50% of the attendees at this conference were residents from BAME communities. This attendance was felt to be a result of strong relationships with the community which had been built over time. The process for this had been to engage with, for example, elderly people through conversations about winter warmth and energy bills, starting the relationship through discussing and addressing things that mattered to them. Residents then attended different groups in their area and there were opportunities to continue the conversation between them and the council. For example, 25 elderly Asian women with limited English attended an IT skills course. The session was designed to be very functional and enabled them to become familiar with the technology. Their experience was positive, and as a result the council had a stronger and consistent relationship with this group. When they were invited to the conference, this invitation spread through by word of mouth and a significant proportion of the community then attended.

This demonstrates how building relationships enables multiple forms of ongoing engagement, particularly if those interested can see the value of engaging with the council (in this case in connection to their health).

Coproduced training

LBH already co-produces some training with people with lived experience around certain issues. For example, following issues raised at the Disability Forum, disabled people were empowered to design and deliver training to bus drivers, aimed at addressing the issues they were having with public transport. Practical exercises were used, putting the drivers in the position of people who use a wheelchair, and it was felt that this made a difference to the way the drivers operated.

Adult Community Education Service

The Adult Community Education Service is another way in which the council engages with the community, creating opportunities to build local relationships.

One of its main purposes is to engage with those furthest away from learning opportunities. They use events such as informal coffee mornings to invite people to participate in a less formal manner as a starting point, and partner with community faith groups to do this. For example, Talk English was mentioned as a successful programme, with over 800 learners going through that project over past year. Delivering this programme gave the team the opportunity and insight to understand some of the barriers faced by the groups and individuals they are working with (mainly women BAME backgrounds).

Volunteers are part of the service and play a vital role in supporting the project to reach people from within their communities by being relatable, by understanding the barriers people may face, and by acting as advocates of the service. This shows that some parts of the council understand the value of working alongside people in the community, as this is a strong factor in determining who engages with the service.

Prevent and Counter-Extremism Team

The Prevent and Counter-Extremism Team undertake crucial work in engaging with some of the hardest to reach communities as part of their Home Office grant obligations. Other work includes:

- The Joint Service Open Day event, which brings together key local and national services including housing, benefits and DWP for face to face conversations and signposting support for local residents. This has been established as a regular event and has been designed to be moved around the borough. (It was attended by around 10,000 residents in 2019).
- The team also use technology to engage and gather insight into local communities, such as monitoring local Facebook groups. At present this is primarily to support their work around far-right extremism, but it is also supporting their insight of “what’s going on” across Hounslow. Having embedded themselves in local communities, the team are often invited to local neighbourhood and community events. They also have an anonymised inbox where residents can get in touch with complaints/comments/concerns.
- Through their work they have become trusted allies of the local faith communities and regularly help to organise large religious/cultural celebrations such as Eid and Vaisakhi (the latter attended by over 10,000 Sikh residents).
- They also accompany residents who feel they would like extra support to local councillors’ surgeries and have close links with Tenants’ & Residents’ Associations and with the Tenants’, Leaseholders’ and Sheltered Tenants Joint Consultative Committee.

These are examples of good practice, demonstrating the use of multiple approaches, marshalling a range of resources, joining up with other services and going into communities to directly engage with local people.



Centre for Local Economic Strategies

CLES, 52 Oak Street, Swan Square
Manchester, United Kingdom, M4 5JA
info@cles.org.uk | www.cles.org.uk
@CLEStinkdo | #clestinkdo
0161 832 7871