

Camden Neighbourhood Assembly

**Project write up
and toolkit**

January 2020

Overview

In 2019 Camden's Health and Wellbeing Board set out to develop a citizen-led neighbourhood approach to health and wellbeing. A Neighbourhood Assembly of local residents was established in the west of the borough to examine the key issues around health and wellbeing, then co-design and develop placed-based solutions with the Council and local partners.

This work is rooted in the context of both Camden 2025 and the NHS Long Term Plan, providing insights on how the Council and health partners can work in closer partnership with communities as we move towards a more integrated system of health and care.

The neighbourhood-based pilot was delivered by residents with support from Camden Council and FutureGov. A range of other local and community-based organisations contributed to the process.

The outputs, ideas and roadmaps from the assembly are in a separate document. This report captures the process and learnings from the project and is presented in two parts:

Part 1

The Camden Neighbourhood Assembly on Health and Wellbeing

Captures this unique approach and reflections on the pilot.

Pages 4 - 25

Part 2

Community Engagement Toolkit

Provides a set of tips and learnings to help teams to run a Neighbourhood Assembly and other participatory processes.

Pages 26 - 42



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PART 1

The Camden Neighbourhood Assembly on Health and Wellbeing



What is the Neighbourhood Assembly?

In March 2019, Camden's Health and Wellbeing Board agreed a one year extension of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2018. This included an additional commitment to explore citizen-led approaches to health and wellbeing. The work was taken forward at two levels:

1. The 'hyper-local' level: a Community Champions pilot conducted on three estates in Camden. Building on the skills and knowledge of local communities by recruiting volunteers to tackle inequalities, improve health and wellbeing.
2. The 'neighbourhood' level: a neighbourhood-based pilot bringing together a group of residents to define the main health challenges in their area, then co-design solutions to improve health outcomes.

High-level aims for both pieces

- Engage the community, local organisations, and partners to think more deeply about opportunities and barriers to health and wellbeing in a more localised way;
- Produce insights that integrate services and assets so people can access support in a less fragmented way;
- Develop citizen agency and voice; and
- Empower local communities to work together to improve health and wellbeing outcomes.

Neighbourhood Assembly

The neighbourhood-based pilot was set across a geographical area coterminous with the local GP Neighbourhood and four electoral wards of Kilburn, Swiss Cottage, Fortune Green and West Hampstead.

The pilot centred on the 'Neighbourhood Assembly' - a small group of local residents, broadly representative of the diversity of the area. They were supported by a Partner Steering Group of health system leaders who oversaw the process, offering valuable knowledge and experience. This was co-chaired by Dr. Dan Beck, Cllr. Pat Callaghan, and Cllr. Nayra Bello O'Shanahan.

The Assembly was convened as a vehicle for innovative partnership working. It was tasked to identify local challenges, develop ideas and prototype solutions; then test and learn from the process.

The unique citizen-led approach allowed ideas to emerge from residents rather than the Council and health partners. The Assembly considered population health and lived experience before exploring what could be done to confront the main challenges.

Process and approach

The Camden Neighbourhood Assembly is not a traditional citizens' assembly as this process blends deliberative democracy and co-design approaches.

The Assembly had a broad remit, without many parameters around what they should focus on or could do: to identify local health and wellbeing challenges and develop a number of place-based ideas to help improve these.

Assembly members explored existing evidence around health and wellbeing challenges, conducted research within their networks, developed and tested ideas for change, then created roadmaps to guide the rollout of the ideas.

Main activities of the Neighbourhood Assembly



Making sense of existing evidence



Conducting research within their networks



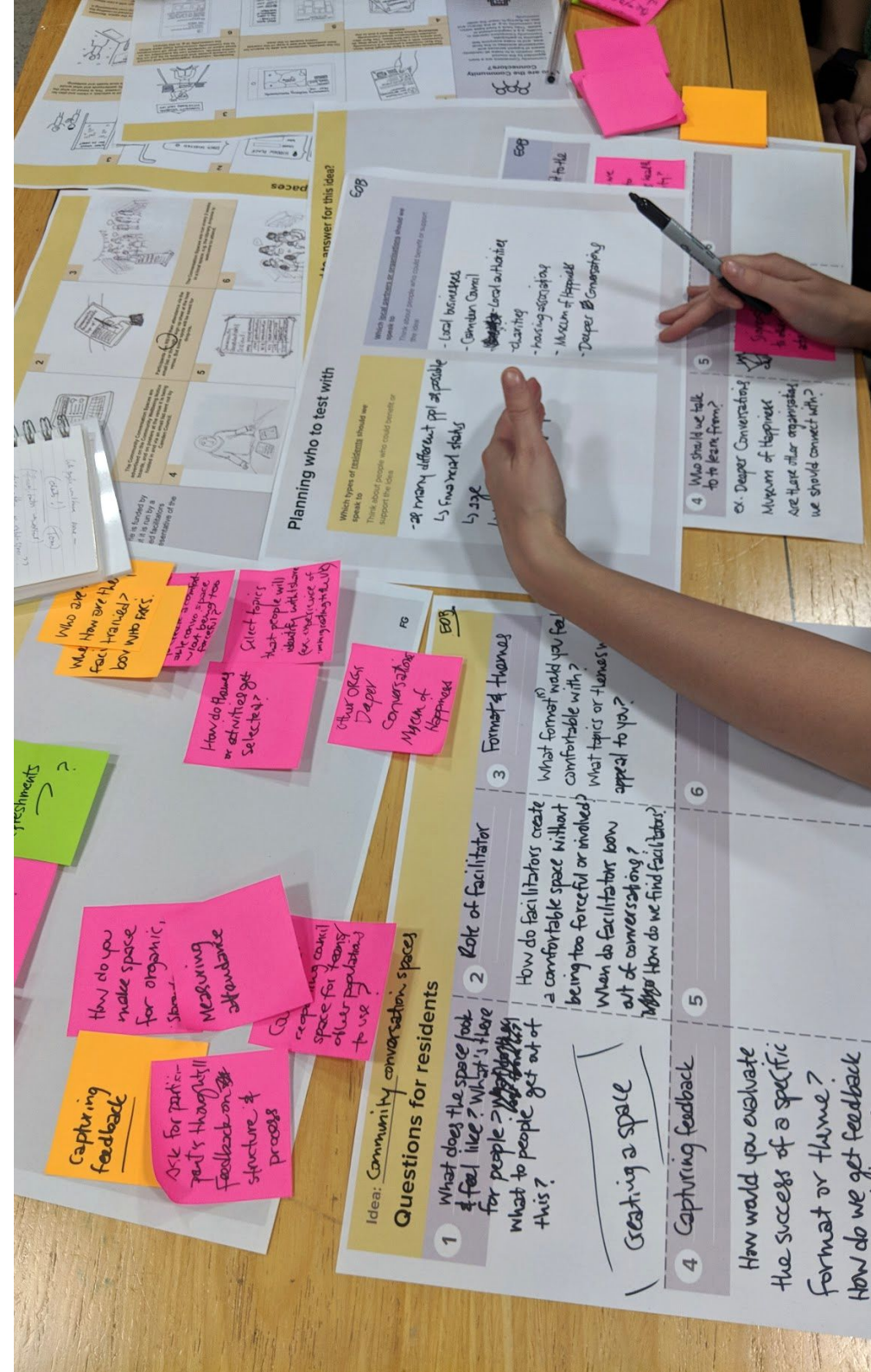
Developing ideas for change



Testing ideas, learning and adapting

What's different with the Neighbourhood Assembly approach is the output. A more traditional citizens' assembly would produce a list of recommendations for the council to deliver.

The ideas and accompanying roadmaps build on existing local efforts and require a combination of council, community partners, and residents to make them a success.



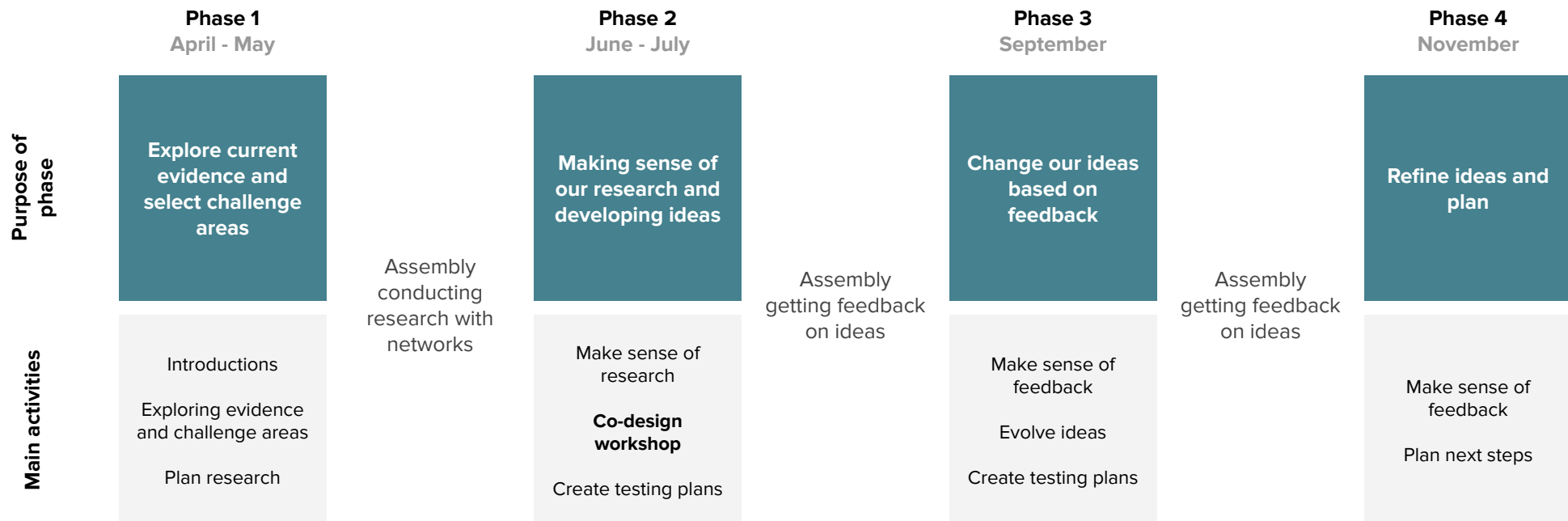
Process and approach

Although the focus and outcomes of the Assembly’s work were undefined, the process was built around four phases spread over the course of 2019. Each phase lasted about 3-4 weeks and was made up of multiple workshops, where most of the deliberation and co-design happened. In between these phases Assembly members conducted independent research in their peer networks and collected feedback on the ideas.

The project team supplemented the resident-led research with additional engagement of local groups typically regarded as harder to reach. The process was designed to be iterative, with Assembly members encouraged to reflect on learnings and adapt their thinking accordingly.

Neighbourhood Assembly workshops were normally two hours long, took place in the evening and were based at various locations in the west of the borough. Below is the outline of the different phases and the main activities that took place at each stage. Some of the templates that were used in the workshops can be found in the Community Participation Toolkit.

A central part of the process was the co-design workshop in phase 2. This larger event brought together Assembly members, other residents, community stakeholders, health partners and council officers to respond to the Assembly’s research and develop ideas to improve health and wellbeing.



Process and approach

Recruitment

The members of the Neighbourhood Assembly were to be broadly representative of the local population, with around eight to twelve residents in the group. The approach to recruitment can be summarised as follows:

Using multiple channels to reach residents. We recruited participants in a number of different ways, including using community researchers, street-level outreach and ongoing engagement of stakeholders. Initial recruitment was geared towards a number of evening 'meet & greet' meetings, where residents could turn up, hear about the project and ask questions.

Broadly representative of four wards. With a smaller Assembly size, it's hard to reflect the true diversity of the neighbourhood. However, we looked at local population data and identified a number of characteristics to seek diversity across, including: gender, age, ethnicity, family type, housing tenure, disabilities, language and employment status. This helped target the recruitment and understand where we had gaps in membership.

Flexible membership and continued targeted recruitment. As opposed to a traditional citizens' assembly that has fixed membership, we intentionally kept membership of the Assembly open, allowing people to join or leave throughout the process. This meant we could continue to engage underrepresented groups and use activities like the co-design event to increase interest and draw new people in.

Finding ways to bring in other voices. It's likely that the Neighbourhood Assembly format, with longer-term commitments and evening meetings, is not going to be for everyone. However we created opportunities to bring other voices in the process and engage with local people on their own terms. This was done through: targeted engagement with community groups, use of the We Are Camden online consultation platform, and by creating one-off opportunities for others to join in, such as the co-design event.



An agile approach



A SPRINT is a regular, repeatable, time-boxed period in which work is completed & made ready for review.

To properly execute the Camden Neighbourhood Assembly, the project team adopted agile principles and some agile methodologies. Agile is a project management approach that allows for iteration, focuses on user needs, and incorporates learnings from the work to improve the process.

This Assembly was broken down into four sprints (called phases). Each phase lasted three to four weeks long and included the following agile rhythms:

Sprint planning: a meeting with the project team at the start of each sprint where the team agrees upon what should be delivered in the upcoming sprint, how the work will be done, and by whom.

How did the Camden Neighbourhood Assembly team do this?
At the beginning of each phase, we identified the dates and times of workshops, outlined the workshop activities, lightly synthesised research, and considered any other supporting work such as stakeholder engagement that should be brought back to the Assembly.

Stand-ups: a short meeting with the project team at the start of the day to ensure the team has a shared understanding of goals, problems and improvements, and has a strong grasp on who will concentrate on what part of the work.

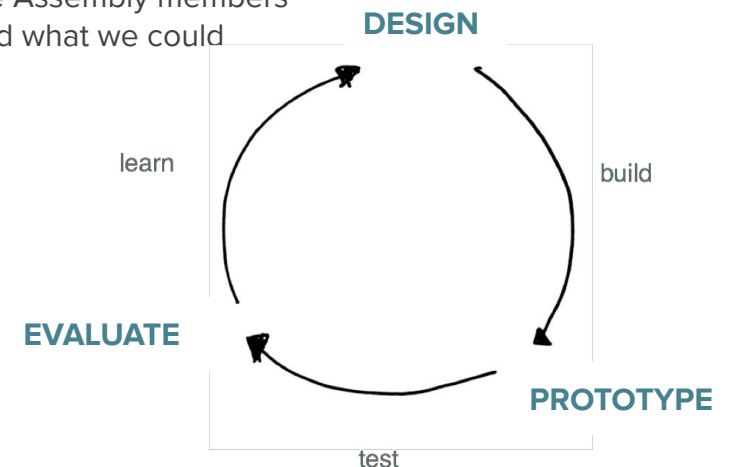
How did the Camden Neighbourhood Assembly team do this?
On the days of workshops, stand-ups ensured that the project team understood how to execute the activities and had a shared vision of what we wanted to achieve in each workshop.

Show & tells: a presentation open to all Council staff and stakeholders that acts as an opportunity to test and get feedback, check temperature, get direction from senior stakeholders.

How did the Camden Neighbourhood Assembly team do this?
Show and tells were used to grow awareness of the Assembly amongst Council staff and identify prospective partners as the ideas became more fully formed. The team also hosted more closed show & tells for the Partner Steering Group.

Retros: a project team meeting where the group reflects on what happened during the sprint and identifies actions for improvement going forward.

How did the Camden Neighbourhood Assembly team do this?
Retros were used to reflect as a project team on the completed phase of work and more specifically on the workshops -- how they felt to execute, how the Assembly members responded to them, and what we could involve or avoid in our future workshops.



An agile approach

What worked well

- Retros were an especially effective mechanism to ensure the **resilience of the team**. Regular engagement and facilitation can be emotionally draining and retros allowed the team to share their experiences and support each other through the more taxing moments.
- Show & tells grew **awareness of the project across the Council and with local stakeholders**. They allowed stakeholders to make connections with other work happening within and beyond the Council. Several of these connections have been incorporated into the final version of the Assembly's roadmaps and testing plans.
- One of the initial challenges had been describing the broad mandate of the Neighbourhood Assembly. However, regular presentations and discussions got the project team describing remit more succinctly.
- Being agile and **responsive to feedback** from Assembly members shaped how each of the phases was executed. The project team consistently captured feedback from Assembly members and reflected internally to ensure that Assembly meetings had a balance of direction and opportunity for people to build relationships.

What was challenging

- **The time between phases** was often significant and resulted in a lull in engagement with Assembly members. Although they often had tasks to complete in the interim, longer breaks (such as the summer hiatus) had negative results on Assembly cohesion. There was a lot of work to be done to rebuild connections between Assembly members after long breaks apart, in addition to some group attrition. The attrition also resulted in a need to recruit throughout the entire Assembly process, which was a draw on project team resource.
- **The pacing between workshops** did not allow enough time to synthesise the ample data collected through online consultations, assembly member research, and stakeholder engagement. Due to the fast pace of workshops, the project team did not always have enough time to properly unpack the research before sharing it with Assembly members.

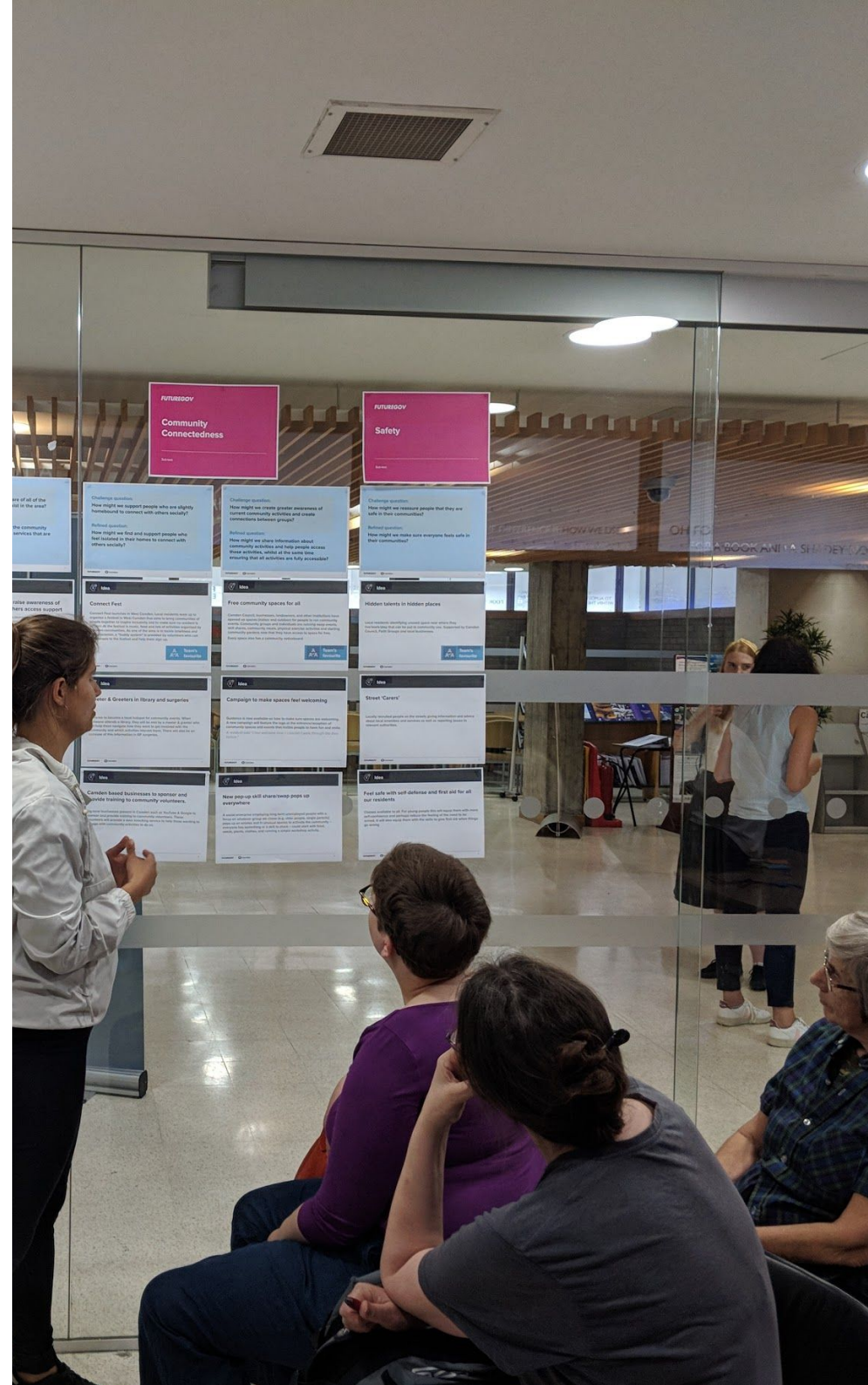
Reflections and learnings from the process

Key reflections and learnings from process

The Camden Neighbourhood Assembly on Health and Wellbeing was a pilot: an experiment into new ways of bringing Camden communities closer to decision-making and giving them the space and tools to create local change. Over the course of the pilot, the project team collected a number of reflections about the process, including things we felt worked well and things that could be improved next time.

The following pages bring together those reflections and learnings from the process, where relevant, including **examples** to bring it to life and **recommendations** for what could be changed in future. The sections are broken into the following themes:

- [Recruiting a diverse group of residents](#)
- [Finding the right pace](#)
- [Building on lived experience](#)
- [Bringing others along the journey](#)
- [The potential impact of the ideas](#)
- [Creating cohesion between residents](#)



Recruiting a diverse group of residents

The Neighbourhood Assembly was designed to have voices from the populations of Kilburn, Swiss Cottage, Fortune Green and West Hampstead, as well as a broad demographic reflection of the area.

Robust and dedicated recruitment enabled us to bring diverse voices into the process, and a variety of engagement approaches made the Assembly accessible to a wide range of people.

01 Recruitment is labour intensive and takes time, energy and resource to do well.

We found that to engage different groups, we had to use different approaches and recruit in a variety of location. This included street engagement, hosting welcome evenings, and asking stakeholder to reach out to their own members. We drove the recruitment through emails, phone calls and social media, forging local connections through meetings, door-knocking and street-level outreach. All had significant resource and staffing implications.

02 It can be confusing to explain what the Neighbourhood Assembly is.

With a loosely defined challenge, few restrictions on the process and no guarantees on the implementation of the ideas, we initially found it difficult to explain the project and get people to commit. However face to face engagement helped to build the trust required to get both residents and stakeholders on board. We found it helpful to accompany community researchers on any street level outreach, helping to explain the nuances of the project.

Recommendation:

Spend time at the outset of your process clearly defining what you are asking of residents. We've created a short video which should help communicate what the Assembly looked like. This should be used along with clear communication packs explaining the process.

03 Keeping the membership of the Assembly flexible was an effective approach.

We recognised that drop-outs were highly likely in a project held over 8 months and mitigated this with financial incentives and time vouchers. We also kept membership of the Assembly flexible and open, with targeted recruitment throughout. This differs to more traditional citizens' assembly which have fixed memberships. It meant we could continue to engage under-represented groups and use one-off events to draw new people in. Assembly members also helped by creating a welcoming atmosphere; introducing themselves, explaining the project and being friendly whenever new people came in.

04 It takes time to properly engage community partners with the process.

Community-based partners are crucial for reaching a broad range of residents, as well as supporting the formulation and delivery of the ideas. It took time to build these relationships and persuade them to invest in the process. Recruitment became easier once community groups had received information and provided their views on the approach.

Example:

When we started the project, we had an initial kick-off session with a wide range of community stakeholders to introduce the Assembly and ask for support with recruitment. The overwhelming feedback was to push back the start of the workshops to engage them more thoroughly and allow more time to recruit residents. We did this and it definitely paid off.

Finding the right pace

When designing the Neighbourhood Assembly, we had to balance several competing priorities around pace: we wanted to keep momentum, but allow participants enough time to absorb information. We wanted to build in enough time for the project team to design and create workshops and the associated materials. We also had to make the workshops as efficient as possible while creating space for generative discussion between Assembly members.

01 Ensure deliberation and decision making doesn't feel rushed.

There was a lot of progress to make in each of the workshops. This often this meant discussion was concise and the Assembly worked together in small groups to digest content. However, there were points where we felt like more time was needed to discuss and agree on big decisions, particularly around selecting which ideas to take forward.

Example:

Following the co-design workshop, there were 18 different ideas that the Assembly had to whittle down to 6. In this workshop, we didn't think there was sufficient time for the Assembly to agree on what ideas to take forward before proceeding. To address this, we created an additional activity where Assembly members did a 'gap analysis' to understand how the ideas addressed local challenges and could adjust to address them even more.

02 Keep the time commitment as low as possible.

We found a tension in giving people enough time to understand evidence, deliberate and build relationships while keeping workshops and commitments short. We felt the longer the overall commitment, the more likely we are to push away people who already face barriers to engaging in participatory processes.

03 It was a challenge to give people enough time to process the data.

In the interest of full transparency, we tried to do most data synthesis with the Assembly. There were points in the process where we felt the Assembly had a lot of information to process. The first and third phases felt especially laborious because of the quantity of data generated through their own research and online consultation. There is always a limit to a group's collective attention, and this can be a useful indicator of what's important, but we still think more time here would have been useful.

Recommendation:

In the future, we'd recommend doing more of the data processing and synthesising as a project team before presenting to the Assembly. It's still important to remain transparent in the process and making all data available for Assembly members to maintain trust.

Building off lived experience

An important part of the Neighbourhood Assembly was that members could shape the ideas and discussion based on the expertise they have gained from living in the area, using services and managing their own health and wellbeing.

Throughout the project there were incredible examples of this in action. For example, when a participant with a long-term mental health condition rewrote the discussion guide so that it would be appropriate.

Where there wasn't adequate lived experience on an issue, we conducted additional research or brought in community partners who could add additional insight.

01 Balancing between data and lived experience.

A strength of the Neighbourhood Assembly was that it enabled residents to drive ideas and decision-making through their lived experience. We did introduce council reports, public health data and consultation with other residents and expert stakeholders, as other forms of evidence. However, the focus was weighted towards the experience of residents.

02 Not having lived experience on particular issues.

Where there was lived experience present in the Assembly, such as mental health or isolation, the conversations felt rich, in-depth and reached issues we wouldn't in a traditional consultation. However, some issues were surfaced through the data and we noticed there wasn't sufficient lived experience amongst Assembly members. Here we felt like decision-making could be driven by assumptions and personal biases.

Example:

One of the areas we focused on was around families and safety. The perspectives in the room, or the peer research, didn't sufficiently capture the experiences of families at risk of crime. So the conversations felt quite light touch and not as in-depth as they would have been were there someone with lived experience on the Assembly.

03 The broad mandate of health and wellbeing made it difficult to have representative lived experience.

As a topic, health and wellbeing is extremely broad, meaning it's not possible to have lived experience in the Assembly across the range of possible issues. This meant that areas of focus naturally leaned towards the experience of those in the room - isolation, mental health conditions and community connectedness.

04 Bring in other forms of expertise where necessary.

Throughout the Assembly, we brought in experts from the Council and local partners. This approach was effective in challenging some of the Assembly's assumptions and answering specific health and wellbeing questions. There were points where other conversations would have benefitted from more of this input, particularly when the Assembly selected the ideas.

Example:

After the Assembly had conducted peer research around each of the challenge areas, they were joined by experts within the Council to help make sense of their findings. One expert was a mental health commissioner, who explained the different services Camden offers and helped the Assembly better understand how they might not be reaching residents' needs.

Bringing others along the journey

The ambition for the Neighbourhood Assembly was that it could build on local services and organisation's work. Ownership for the ideas and process needed to be built with:

- Other residents and community members
- Council and NHS staff
- External community partners

With a topic as broad as health and wellbeing, the list of potential internal and external stakeholders was very long. As well as show and tells and individual engagement, we sent around weekly emails updating everyone on the Assembly's progress.

We felt there was a buzz about the project in the local communities, one colleague overheard the Assembly being discussed in a Swiss Cottage library.

01 Creating a new type of relationship between residents and the Council.

In our early engagements, we received different reactions from residents and partners -- many of whom are used to interacting with the Council in a more *consultative* or *confrontational* capacity. Through the Assembly process, we were asking them to shape the agenda, priorities, and ideas. This could be confusing and slightly difficult to communicate at first, but we also received positive feedback about the approach and the changed relationship with the Council.

02 Better connecting other parts of the organisation and partners.

One of the of outcomes of the Assembly was that it created an understanding of how the Council and partners worked from a resident perspective. In the process of doing this, it meant that the Assembly also became a vehicle for connecting different parts of the Council and stakeholders together.

Example:

Between phases 3 and 4, we ran a number of stakeholder meetings where we brought together relevant stakeholder who were working in similar areas or had expertise that could inform the Assembly's ideas. These meetings were really productive and meant that services had to explain what their project was, in plain english and how it related to other initiatives going on. A number of obvious partnerships came out of these meetings.

03 Involving Camden colleagues in the engagement process was a success.

There's been a lot of interest across the Council in the Assembly and where possible, involving Council colleagues in the project has been a success. Having Camden colleagues and other organisations come to the workshops, particularly the co-design workshop, not only provided expertise but also a sense of importance. Having the Assembly start and end with input from senior members and directors added to this.

04 Sharing work in progress with the broader community and stakeholders.

Throughout the Assembly process, we used We Make Camden, Camden's online consultation platform, to gather public feedback on the ideas. This allowed us to grow awareness of the Neighbourhood Assembly process but also engage a wider group than the Assembly to ensure the ideas would resonate throughout Camden. We felt by making the ideas visual and attractive, it invited participation and enabled people to better understand and input on the ideas.

We also shared the ideas in various stages of development by taking them show and tells, collaboration meetings and the Partner Steering Group - a group of local health system leaders who oversaw the process and leveraged their knowledge and influence in support of the Assembly.

The potential impact of the ideas

There were no restraints on what the ideas should be or how they should be delivered. The Assembly defined their own criteria for selecting the areas of focus and then for deciding which ideas to progress.

The ideas tended to focus less on specific local health concerns, and more on prevention, wellbeing and community connectivity. This may be because these issues spoke to a broad range of people and had consensus within the group.

01 The ideas developed were realistic and shared endeavours between the Council, residents and community partners.

From the start of the Assembly, we told Assembly members that the shape of the ideas was open: they could be things that the Council could do differently, or they could be resident initiatives. All three of the emergent ideas required residents, partners and the Council to work together to deliver them.

Example:

In Phase 1, the Assembly agreed criteria for how they would select challenge areas to explore. One that was suggested by a member and picked as a key criteria was 'Something that we (the community) and the council can have an impact on' and addressing 'Something we can *prevent* from happening'.

02 The ideas focus on more service level innovation than structural change.

Two of the ideas focused on new initiatives to tackle specific local wellbeing challenges. One - the health and wellbeing notice boards - focused on connecting up and communicating better what was already going on. The ideas and assembly didn't explore more structural issues, for example, how community based services very commissioned locally. Future assemblies could also support residents to think about these other issues.

03 Making sure ideas tackled the defined local challenges.

Towards the end of the project, as more energy went into refining the ideas, it felt like they came slightly dislodged from the actual problems the neighbourhood assembly had previously defined. We brought in additional activities to help the assembly think through how and *if* the ideas would actually address the problems they had identified.

04 The co-design day was a successful approach to developing innovative ideas.

We felt that bringing together Assembly members (who had conducted research), with other residents, officers and community partners at the co-design event was a big success. The conversations felt rich and explored the challenge briefs in detail. The ideas developed at that session had quite a lot of nuance and built on existing provision. The event also created a lot of energy and encouraged a number of new members to join the Assembly.

Creating cohesion between residents

The first assembly session felt like a number of individuals joining the project to complain about a single issue they felt passionate about. Over time, this evolved into a group of people who were working much more as a team.

The Assembly created connections between residents who might not normally mix. We saw members share numbers and comfort each other after a bad day. We felt that there were certain members of the assembly who were experiencing social isolation and joining the workshops was a notable event in their week.

Through this process, the Council invested in the capacity of a group of residents to come together to understand problems and develop ideas in response. The Assembly could prove a useful resource for future projects and initiatives if supported to continue.

01 A real sense of community developed between the assembly over time.

A strong sense of community emerged from the group as the project developed. It felt like a collective identity and shared purpose formed between what began as a disparate group with individual priorities. A 'club-like' mentality emerged that supported deliberative decision making.

02 Some of the most fruitful interactions came from intergenerational mixing.

Over the course of the project, there were diverse age ranges involved in the assembly. With the youngest member at 14 (not counting babies) and oldest over 80. The best discussions came about through these discussions and exchanging perspectives between the group.

Example:

In an early session, the assembly were discussing mental health conditions. An older member of the group talked about how they didn't feel like younger people had to worry about mental health challenges. At which point, one of the younger members explained how this wasn't the case, followed by open and honest conversation.

03 One of the ideas sounded quite close to what the Neighbourhood Assembly does.

One of the ideas, called *Conversation Spaces*, was regularly scheduled social events which provide residents with an opportunity to come together to discuss topics they care about. A host (facilitator) supports the event and conversation. This idea felt quite close to what the assembly was doing and speaks to positive benefits that members got from taking part in the process.

Delivering a Neighbourhood Assembly

There are a number of challenges and opportunities that come with delivering a project of this nature.

Over the course of the year, we delivered twelve workshops, a co-design event and two information evenings. Each of which required bespoke materials and planning. This is on top of recruitment, extensive stakeholder engagement and reporting.

The project also required a different working relationship with residents and local partners.

01 High emotional resilience was required from the team.

Managing a project like this means a huge amount of uncertainty. There are many factors well beyond the teams control, in particular: who, if anyone, will turn up and the direction of discussions and ideas developed. This has all the makings for an emotional rollercoaster and requires the team to be able to separate their effort from project outcomes.

02 A different culture and approach required from Council staff.

Success relied on a commitment from officers to work in genuine partnership with residents. This meant relinquishing power to the community and acting to further their decisions. Trust was gained by building meaningful relationships, engaging regularly in face-to-face conversations and maintaining an honest dialogue about the vision and intent of the project. It was important that the Council was seen to go to the community, rather than the other way round. We achieved this through street level outreach, visiting local groups and by holding all our workshops in local community centres and libraries.

03 The process requires a large resource for it to function properly.

The Neighbourhood Assembly is a resource intensive project. This includes everything from creating weekly workshop materials, running sessions, recruiting and reminding participants, managing a huge number of internal and external stakeholders, to reporting back. For these projects to run smoothly and do justice to the effort and input of residents, it requires significant resource behind it.

04 The open subject area has knock on challenges for delivery.

The broad scope of the Assembly meant that residents had the agency to prioritise and explore whatever issues they felt were meaningful to them and their communities. However, we felt that opening exploring health and wellbeing as a topic may have been too broad for this format. This had knock on effects to a number of different issues: involving relevant stakeholders, finding the right supporting evidence and expertise, the amount of depth we could explore an issue during workshops and working to get relevant lived experience in the room. These all had implications for resource required for delivery.

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Resident & project team testimonials

Throughout the Assembly process, we collected feedback from participants. Below are some of the overarching themes from that feedback.

01 A stronger connection to Camden Council

At the conclusion of the Neighbourhood Assembly, nearly all Assembly members indicated they had more positive feelings towards Camden Council. In particular, Assembly members appreciated being involved in the decision making process and getting a better understanding of ongoing initiatives on health and wellbeing.

02 The structure did not work for everyone

One participant ended up bowing out of the Assembly process as the ideas took more shape and form, and recruitment continued. He felt as though growing the Assembly beyond the original group changed the ideas beyond his view of them. At the same time, the flexible structure did allow some participants to engage with the Assembly who could not commit throughout the entire process.

“People always criticise the Council, but this amazing Assembly is doing things for people, by people in Camden.”

ANYA

03 Assembly members felt able to influence decision making

Nearly all Assembly members reported feeling able to influence the decision making process. Members were giving ability to control the direction of the project, from setting priorities to selected their preferred ideas.

04 The ideas may not reach the most vulnerable populations in Camden

Although the three ideas and roadmaps are very detailed and most Assembly members felt ownership over them, some Assembly members felt they did not properly address health and wellbeing issues for the most vulnerable populations in Camden (namely health inequalities).

“I like that it’s flexible. It’s OK if you don’t do things or come and you still feel welcome. It’s a process and you can join whenever.”

HARRIETT

05 Connections with other members of the community

Every Assembly member who provided feedback expressed that they had met new members of their community and formed meaningful connections with one another. Several Assembly members expressed a desire for the Assembly to keep meeting independently to maintain those connections.

06 The Assembly process addressed social isolation for members

Several Assembly members indicated that they did not have large social networks before participating in the Assembly. By conducting research and participating in the Assembly workshops, members became less socially isolated themselves.

“We hadn’t met before joining the Assembly. During the process, we realised we live in the same apartment block!”

HANNAH



“Thanks to the Camden Council & FutureGov teams for the excellent facilitation. I am impressed that the Council invested so much in the Neighbourhood Assembly.”

**- Martina, Neighbourhood
Assembly Member**



**“It’s been a good experience,
better than expected. Young
people doing well, reaching out
to the community.”**

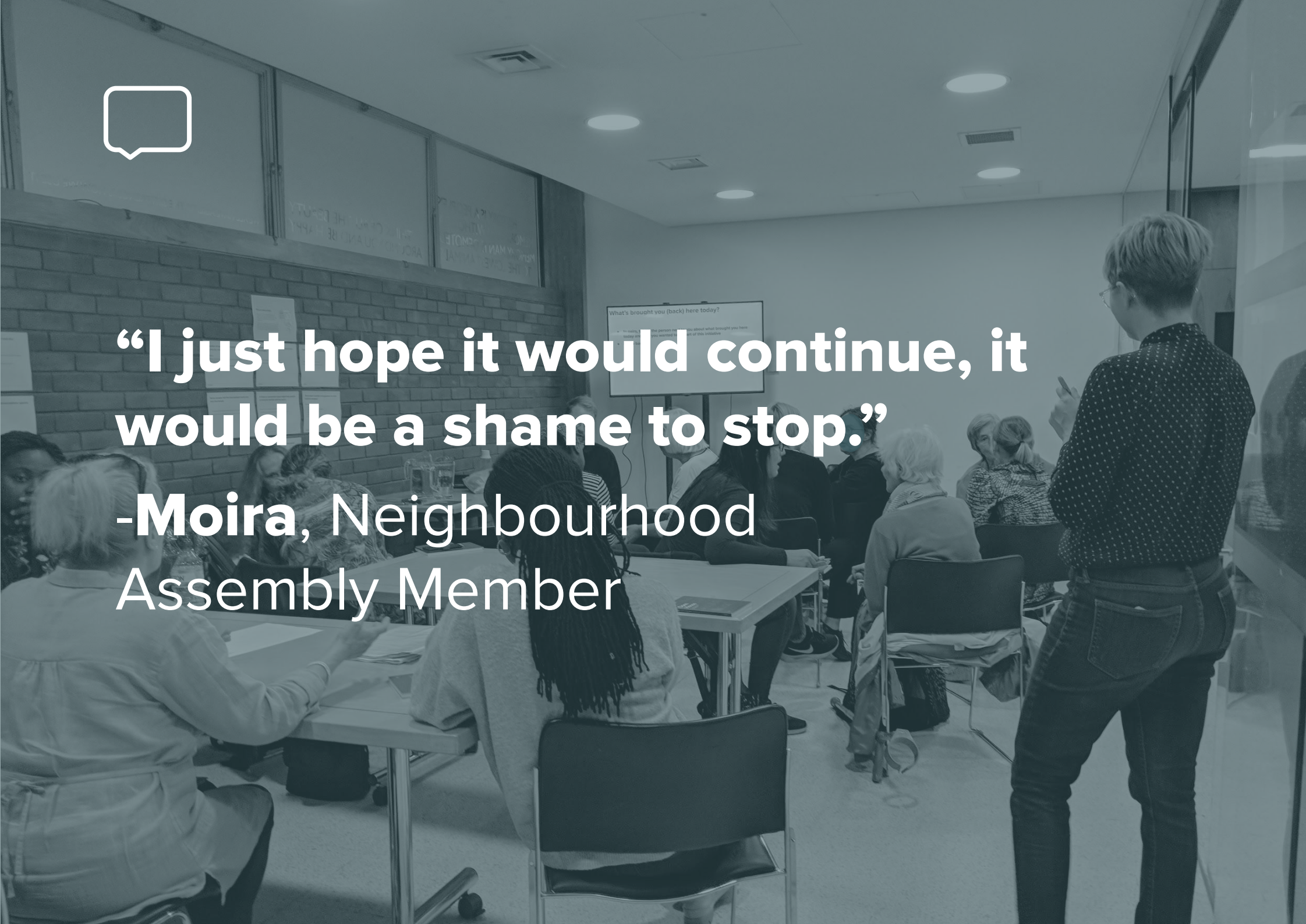
**- Sally, Neighbourhood
Assembly Member**





“I just hope it would continue, it would be a shame to stop.”

**-Maira, Neighbourhood
Assembly Member**





“I enjoyed the Assembly.. but we will see the success by what happens after and see implementation.”

-Maira, Neighbourhood Assembly member

Project team testimonial

"Get used to feeling out of control"

"From the off it was clear just how much enthusiasm there was amongst residents for a different kind of relationship with the Council. As time passed we built real relationships and trust grew as it became clear the participants were in the driving seat.

For me, the most striking thing was the transformation of the Neighbourhood Assembly over time. As we progressed through each phase, the group evolved from an energetic collection of individuals to a fully functional, decision-making collective. Initially many people had brought their own issues and concerns to the table, often competing for a platform to voice them. However, as a club-like mentality emerged, so too did the interest in affecting positive change for the community as a whole.

I have no doubt that this partnership approach directly contributed to the project's success. An intensive programme of workshops, events, focus groups and wider engagement meant that all parties were able to demonstrate their commitment - and by the end we were all considered equal members of the same team.

However, anyone undertaking a long term citizen-led project of this nature should avoid underestimating the demands and get used to feeling out of control. A truly citizen-led process means relinquishing power over the process, direction and decision-making. This may require a radical shift in culture.

Overall, the project demonstrated the knowledge and energy that already exists in Camden's communities. For me, the Council is at its best when acting as an enabler of change - facilitating resident-led initiatives, removing barriers and joining the dots between local partners. I think we all have a responsibility to work in much closer partnership with residents."

Henry Langford
Project Lead, Camden Council



PART 2

Community Engagement Toolkit

How to run a Neighbourhood Assembly
and other participatory processes

How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help Camden Council teams plan and execute participatory processes, particularly those which follow a similar approach to the Neighbourhood Assembly: engaging community groups over a longer period of time through co-design and deliberation.

The toolkit can be used in different ways: the format created for the Neighbourhood Assembly on Health and Wellbeing can be used in another field, or to focus on a more specific issue.

Aspects of the Neighbourhood Assembly process can also be used on their own, outside of a long-term engagement process. For example, co-design events could be used to support interested community members in testing and delivering ideas.

The toolkit includes:

- **Considerations for designing public engagement:** what are main things to consider when creating the engagement approach.
- **Practical tips:** useful things we have learnt through the process which can make the process easier.
- **Resources and templates:** some of the most useful templates we used to help work through the activities with residents. The original version of these templates are in a separate document.



01

Why are you convening people?

Consider what you are asking of participants and the reason behind that request. Is it to understand local priorities, mobilise community energy, or develop collective ideas to address a local issue? A clear, concise, compelling request written in plain language will make your process appealing to a wider range of people.

02

Where you are drawing participants from?

Is it a specific estate, neighbourhood, borough or a city region? Consider the reach of the issue you're asking participants to speak to -- if it is hyper-local, concentrate your recruitment to a specific area. If your issue is farther reaching, consider expanding your reach. Recognise that the larger the area, the less tied the discussions may be to a specific local assets.

03

Who should be in the room? How many people do you want there?

Is it particularly important for Assembly members to have lived experience on a given issue? If so, factor this into who you recruit. If the issue you're convening people around requires a demographically representative group, consider a more robust recruitment method such as a civic lottery.

04

How long do you want to engage people?

A longer engagement may act as a barrier to access for some people, however, a longer-term engagement typically results in more detailed recommendations and buy-in. It is important to convey the length of your engagement to prospective participants to both manage their expectations and provide clarity on what you're requesting of them.

05

How strict will you be on attendance?

In traditional citizens' assemblies, attendance is almost mandatory and recruitment is a fixed activity that concludes before the assembly convenes. A more flexible attendance expectation lends itself to an ongoing engagement with a varied group of participants. It is important to consider how to build trust and legitimacy in your process while being open to new participants and catching them up to speed with progress.

06

How strict will you be on process?

When adopting agile methodologies, being flexible and adaptable to incorporate learnings is crucial. There can be a feeling of uncertainty through this flexibility, which can be challenging for participants. Ensure that you're being honest and transparent with participants and that you are incorporating their feedback into the process whenever possible.

Tensions when designing a Neighbourhood Assembly

We have found the following competing tensions at play. The decision will often come down to **why** you are engaging people.

In-depth deliberation vs. staying open and inclusive

The longer the Assembly runs for, the more time people will have to process data and discuss issues (it's also good for owning ideas and cohesion). This can also exclude participants who may not be able to commit the time.

Hyper-local insights vs. the size of the area engaged

The smaller the geographical area, the more localised and specific the insights will be (e.g. about local assets or relationships). However, this will mean residents are only engaged and resources are invested into a small area.

Trust in process vs. flexibility for how innovation happens

A rigid process and approach can create a sense of fairness and buy-in to outcomes. But developing ideas isn't linear, and things need to be able to adapt to new opportunities or where the Assembly's excitement and energy is.

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Practical tips for running a Neighbourhood Assembly

1

Give yourself time to recruit. Recruitment will make or break your engagement process. Recruitment cannot be rushed and often takes more time than anticipated, so give yourself ample time to recruit the right people.

2

Decide if recruitment will occur before or will be ongoing. Recognise that for longer term projects there will be attrition in the group and that recruitment may have to be ongoing, especially if there are demographic gaps in your population. If recruitment is ongoing, remember to properly onboard people into the engagement process and provide support to those recruiting.

3

Consider accessibility needs of your participants. Consider what needs your participants may have when recruiting and be clear about what you are able to accommodate. If you are able to provide childcare, translators, wheelchair accessibility and/or compensation, indicate that in your recruitment request.

4

Be clear on what you're asking people to do. Write a clear request of your prospective participants so they understand what you're asking of them. Include the length of engagements, the topics you will cover, and logistical details. The more digestible your request for participants is, the easier recruitment will be.

5

Use local stakeholder organisations to amplify recruitment. Consult local stakeholders on who should be in the room and how to reach them effectively. Stakeholder organisations often have networks of their own that may be challenging to access directly as a Council. This can also be crucial for targeted recruitment of more 'hard-to-reach' groups.

6

Recruit face-to-face as much as possible. Street recruitment, though resource-intensive, is very effective on a local level. Consider occupying a stall on a busy market day to reach a broad range of people. Supplement this with different approaches such as online recruitment, door knocking and recruitment through local organisations.

Recruitment in practice

The Neighbourhood Assembly project team recruited throughout the lifecycle of the Assembly. Focus groups, interviews and feedback sessions doubled up as recruitment exercises. Attending events like JesterFest and meeting with young people at The Hive allowed Assembly members to simultaneously test their ideas and attract new members.

Facilitation in practice

“Having such a large team of facilitators meant that everyone was supported and encouraged to contribute.” - Neighbourhood Assembly member

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1

A high number of facilitators are needed to make the event as inclusive as possible. We found *at least 4* facilitators for a group of 14 were required for the workshops. This meant that we could break into smaller groups, where everyone's voice could be heard. A spare person is useful to handle more disruptive participants.

2

Ensure conversations are not dominated by the most vocal members. Do not presume quieter participants are disengaged, bring them into the conversation. Take time to speak with them 1-2-1 and raise their points on their behalf if necessary. Collectively create principles for the how the assembly should work together.

3

Encourage members to bring their own experience, but work to recognise bias and agenda. Continually remind people of importance of representing the wider community rather than just single issues. Ask questions that encourage people to reflect on assumptions they are making. It also helps to have a 'parking lot', a place to capture things that people are passionate about but aren't necessarily relevant.

4

Facilitators need to bring passion and energy for the project and approach. This is contagious and helps residents to buy-in and get excited about the project. Expect participants to be nervous and quiet at first - facilitators may need to take the lead in the initial sessions, gently encouraging people to participate.

5

Make things tangible and visual as early as possible. Simple illustration will do, but this makes the work feel real and is easier for people to discuss. We also found that having illustrations of the work helped create interest draw people into the project.

1

Provide food and refreshments at every meeting. Food and refreshments make meetings more appealing for participants and remove a barrier to access for more vulnerable participants. Ensure you're able to accommodate any dietary restrictions or food allergies.

2

Provide childcare & other types of care. Ensure that you mention this accommodation when recruiting to make your engagements more accessible to parents and caregivers.

3

Communicate early and often. Remind participants about meeting details regularly and through different mediums. Text messages were the most praised mode of communication from the Neighbourhood Assembly.

4

Maintain a consistent schedule. Select a regular day of the week and a specific time for meetings to build the habit within participants. Consider what times work best for your participants as well.

5

Use the same venue. Participants will start to feel more comfortable when using the same venue repeatedly and will more reliably engage with your process as a result.

6

Use a centrally located, comfortable venue. Venues like libraries and community centres are comfortable for a wide variety of the population, are wheelchair accessible and often closely located to public transit.

Venue & logistics in practice

In the Neighbourhood Assembly, we typically met at Swiss Cottage Library on the ground floor. Project team members would email and text each Assembly member before each meeting to ensure they had the logistical details on-hand.





1

Continuous communication is essential for this kind of project. Things move quickly and it is important that relevant partners have a view on this. We found that regular emails after each session sharing what had been decided and what was happening next week worked well.

2

Bring in senior colleagues at key points in the project. For us, this was the start and end as well as at the co-design workshop in the middle. This helps to give a sense of the importance of the assembly. It is also helps to build senior understanding and collective responsibility for the project.

3

Encourage colleagues and partners to the sessions to help facilitate or give expert advice. People are always interested in seeing the project or hearing from people involved, bring them to the neighbourhood assembly, not the other way round! You might have to remind them that they are their to input, but not steer the conversation.

4

Run regular show and tells as a way of sharing the progress with a larger group of people. We held these after each phase of work and were well attended by internal and external stakeholders. There's often a lot of expertise and energy in the room so make sure it's harnessed.

Stakeholders in practice

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Director of Public Health attended key workshops, confirming the importance of the Neighbourhood Assembly to members. Officers from mental health commissioning and Age UK Camden also provided expert knowledge when developing the ideas.

1

Prepare people for what you ask of them. If homework such as research and further engagement is expected of participants, ensure you both teach them how to do it and give them the resources to do it well. In the Neighbourhood Assembly, members conducted practice interviews before conducting research themselves.

2

Give people space to provide feedback on the process. Certain sessions or engagement approaches can be challenging for some participants. In every session, give participants space to reflect back on how certain activities made them feel.

3

Remove barriers to access. By providing childcare, refreshments, and translation, engagement processes become more widely accessible to a larger group of people. Encourage participants to share their needs with you so you can make them as comfortable as possible.

4

Appreciate people's contributions to the process. Publicly recognise the time and effort your participants bring to engagement sessions. Thanking people at every session and hosting a small celebration at the conclusion of the engagement goes a long way in the eyes of participants in recognising their contributions.

5

Recognise people's lives outside engagement. Participants may show up late, or come unprepared to a session. Be flexible and adaptable to catch them up and appreciate that they are making time in their lives to contribute to your process. Provide them with reminders about meetings and reading materials they can absorb in their own time.

Resident experience


At the conclusion of the Neighbourhood Assembly, we presented Assembly members with Certificates of Public Service. Several prominent Council figures also personally thanked participants, which went a long way in making them feel appreciated.



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Resources and templates

1. Challenge matrix

<p>Community led ideas</p> <p>Ideas that can be driven by the energy and effort of residents</p>		
<p>Council led ideas</p> <p>Ideas that need to be driven by the council or other local organisations</p>		
<p> Camden</p> <p>FUTUREGOV</p>	<p>Making changes to what there is already</p> <p>How can we make changes to current services and support?</p>	<p>Creating something new</p> <p>What completely new things do we need?</p>

Matrix template to get participants to generate different types of ideas: new or building on existing; community-led or council-led.

Link to template:

2. Newspaper template

Camden New Journal

Thursday 22nd May The Independent London Journal

Main idea headline

Other idea

Other idea

Other idea

FG

Newspaper template for people to summarise their ideas in a visual way.

Link to template:

1. Planning who to test with worksheet

Planning who to test with

	Who do we need to test this idea with?	How might we reach these people?
Who might benefit or use this idea?		
Who might be involved in supporting it?		

FG

Worksheets for assembly members to think through all the possible people that might be involved in using, creating or delivering the idea, and how they will engage them.

Link to template:

2. Question capture worksheet

Idea: _____

Questions for residents

1	2	3
4	5	6

Idea: _____

Questions for stakeholders

1	2	3
4	5	6

Worksheets for assembly members to capture the questions they want to answer in their research

Link to template:

1. Interview capture sheets

1 Tell me about what health and wellbeing means to you in this neighbourhood. What are good things, what are bad things?	2 What does community mean to you?	3 What are some of the main causes of social isolation?
This question helps people understand the broad focus, and provides time for you to build trust	A question which introduces the topic you are exploring	A question which investigates a specific issue. Asking 'why' 3 times gets to the root cause of the issue
4 What do you think could improve community connectedness in your local neighbourhood?	5 Thinking about the conversation we've just had, what would you like to see different in 5 years time and how do you think this could happen?	
A question which investigates a specific issue. Asking 'why' 3 times gets to the root cause of the issue	This question ends the conversation on a positive note, and starts to generate some ideas. You could ask them what the community as well as services could do. Ask if they would like to be involved in the Neighbourhood Assembly, especially the co-design event on 20th June, 5pm-8pm.	

Worksheets for assembly members to use when going out and speaking to people. This breaks down the questions that need to be answered and why they are being asked. Provide space for additional questions or note taking.

Link to template:

2. Demographic data capture sheet

Interview no.	Age	Neighbourhood	Ethnicity	Employment status	Housing status	Gender	

Please **do not** write down their name or other identifying feature UNLESS they have given consent

On the back of the sheets should be a table to capture demographic data of the people being interviewed. This allows us to understand the diversity of participants involved in the research.

Link to template:

3. Consent forms

Getting consent

Your rights & privacy

It's up to you whether you want to take part in this research. You can decide to not take part at any point. We will make all the information gathered during this research is anonymous. Only the neighbourhood assembly, FutureGov and Camden Council will have access to the information

Recording the session

We would like to take notes of our interviews to help remember what we talked about. Your consent form and any interview notes will be stored securely up to three months after the end of the project. If at any time you decide that you no longer wish for us to store identifiable information about you, you can get in touch and ask for it to be deleted.

How we use your information

Some of the information we will be asking for is: AGE, GENDER, NEIGHBOURHOOD, ETHNICITY, EMPLOYMENT & HOUSING STATUS. We will share quotes from this interview with Camden Council and FutureGov to inform the improvement of health & wellbeing in the neighbourhood.

Contacting us

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this research or use of your information please contact henry.langford@camden.gov.uk

Consent forms to give to assembly members for them to get recorded consent from participants they are interviewing.

Link to template:

1. What's most important from the research














Idea name:	
Look through the feedback you've gathered, and capture the things that stand out . What are the most important things to takeaway?	
What's important to consider for <u>residents</u> ?	What's important to consider for <u>stakeholders</u> ?

Worksheet to help assembly members to pull out the most important bits of feedback from the research

Link to template:

1. Refining ideas template

Community wellbeing notice boards

Who should it be led by?	 Team of self-appointed residents	 Volunteers	 Council-led		
What format should it be in?	 Physical noticeboards	 Digital notice boards			
How often should it be updated?	 Once per month	 Every 2 weeks	 Once a week		
Where should they be?	 On an estate	 Bus stop	 Green spaces	 GP	 Community centre

Worksheet to think through the different elements of the ideas and make decisions on how it should work.

Link to template:

2. Refining the ideas

Idea name:

Look at the most important feedback you've captured, and think through how the idea needs to **change**

Who is the idea aimed at?	Who is involved in running the idea?	What's the role of residents, council, partners?
What format should the idea take?	Where should the idea take place?	What are the timings for the idea?

Worksheet to think through how the ideas need to change as a result of what is learned from the research.

Link to template:

3. Storyboarding template

Hidden Community Spaces			
<p>What are 'Hidden' community spaces?</p> <p>A diverse group of residents are brought together to renovate a disused or unattractive community spaces.</p>	<p>1</p> 	<p>2</p> 	<p>3</p> 
	<p>Anyone can suggest 'hidden spaces' in their neighbourhood that are run down or underused. These could be anything - small or large - including an area of an estate, community centres or run down gardens. Suggestions could be made through a website.</p>	<p>A recommended space would be selected to be renovated. This could be based on number of community votes or a selection criteria.</p>	<p>Once a place is selected, a vision and plan for the place is created. This is based on what the community wants/needs and what would improve local health and wellbeing.</p>
<p>4</p> 	<p>5</p> 	<p>6</p> 	<p>7</p> 
<p>The local community and businesses can donate equipment, materials or money towards the space. This could also include getting crowdfunding from local people or getting funding from elsewhere.</p>	<p>A representative group of the community are brought together to help renovate the space. Other people with necessary skills are also brought in. Local organisations (e.g. community centres) are also involved.</p>	<p>The space is renovated!</p>	<p>People can use and enjoy the space. Because local people have been involved in creating the space - they feel ownership over maintaining it. The process start over again with a new space and area!</p>

Storyboard template to articulate how the idea will work in a way that is visual and easy to understand.

Link to template:

FUTUREGOV



Thank you

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