

Story: Citizen Assemblies in Camden

Carried out in 2017, the Camden Citizen Assembly was a new mechanism to bring residents closer than ever before to decision-making. It was delivered in preparation for the development of a vision to make the borough a better place for everyone by 2025. The council wanted a genuinely blank canvass, for residents to identify the main challenges for the future, to help co-produce solutions to tackle the issues identified.

Getting this right involved scoping the project, recruiting resident assembly members, designing the meetings, and capturing the outcomes of discussions to feed into the Camden 2025 plan.

The council recruited over 60 assembly members in total. These were initially identified using Camden's network of community researchers, whose roots into the community allowed the council to recruit a broad cross-section of local people.

Special effort was made to ensure that hard-to-reach groups were spoken to – such as young people, private sector tenants, carers, people with physical disabilities, and those who had not previously taken part in public engagement. Quotas were used to guarantee that membership of the assembly was representative of the demographic of the borough as a whole. The process did not aim to recruit those who were already engaged in local politics or the community, as the council wanted to target those whose voices were seldom heard.

Three meetings were held in total, over the period running from October to December 2017. At each meeting, residents shared their experiences of living in Camden, and gave their views about how to make Camden a better place to live.

As part of the journey of collaboratively designing a vision for future, assembly members:

- heard from the Leader of the Council about the role of the Assembly, and why developing a shared vision for the borough is so important
- met other local people who live in the borough and share their experiences about Camden
- developed a shared Citizens' Assembly vision for what the borough should look like in 2025
- and explored how the vision can be achieved, how challenges can be overcome and what should be the biggest priorities for the borough.

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The three events were structured using an appreciative inquiry approach, helping the residents who attended to move from broad, top-line aspirations, through to engaging with some of the hard thinking in terms of the long-term strategic vision. This gave them a genuine stake in decision-making, and feedback from attendees was extremely positive.

The assembly outcomes and summary of deliberations were fed back to Camden Council's Cabinet Member councillors, who are using the outcomes of the assembly to help shape Camden 2025, the long term community vision for the area.

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