

Case study

September 2016

London Borough of Lambeth

Embedding community engagement across the whole council

A cooperative council

The London Borough of Lambeth has gone through a process of transformation to become a cooperative council, which has been based on giving people more involvement and control of the services they use and the places where they live by putting council resources in their hands. As a cooperative council, meaningful partnerships and cooperation should be created between service providers and service users, with the goal of delivering public services that are more closely aligned with people's needs and expectations. The cooperative council model aims to ensure that Lambeth delivers services with its communities, rather than to its communities.

Principles of cooperation

There are five key principles which underpin the cooperative model adopted by Lambeth: partnership with the community; co-production (services planned by staff, users and the community on an equal basis); reciprocity (incentivising participation); local employment and skills development; and maximum accessibility and equalities. Examples of cooperation in practice include:

- The Work Shop was set up in the early days of the transition process in a commercial property in West Norwood. A range of different partner organisations were involved, including representatives from health services, the police and JobCentre Plus, as well as local councillors, community groups and council officers. The purpose was to provide an easily accessible route for communication, to find out more about how residents were already involved in delivering the council's outcomes and to identify ways in which community action and cooperation could develop. Extended opening and targeting specific community groups were two ways in which The Work Shop set out engaging with a broad section of the community.
- The Open Works project was a series of community initiatives based on local residents collaborating to build a sustainable future and develop their skills, so they could better contribute and participate in the delivery of cooperative services. Sixteen different projects were developed over an 18-month period, with different degrees of success and

sustainability. For example, The Great Cook brought people together in a community kitchen to learn skills related to batch cooking and food safety. Another project created a community garden outside a bus station.

- The Young Lambeth Cooperative (YLC) is a membership organisation set up as a partnership by young people, community members and the council to revolutionise the way services for young people are chosen and run. The main role is to choose and then commission services for young people. Between 2014 and 2017, approximately £9 million in funding was allocated by the YLC. The YLC also aims to raise additional funds to increase the range of services it commissions and provides.

Key learning from becoming a cooperative council

Introducing community action principles will bring change.

Service change: engaging with the community in a systematic way identified that services were not always meeting the needs of the local community as previously perceived by the council. Services provided by the London Borough of Lambeth or commissioned by Lambeth have had to change as a result. Different providers, different locations and different objectives may all be appropriate.

Structural change: introducing cooperative principles has required organisational changes by the council, particularly in ensuring clear lines of accountability for everyone involved. This process is ongoing – some organisational changes were not successful in the first instance and so further changes have been required.

Cultural change: working in collaboration required council employees to change their approaches and perceptions. People had to think and work differently, particularly in terms of relationships with service users and how to engage with hard to reach groups in the community. Fears had to be overcome, particularly in relation to relinquishing some control of service design to service users. Mentors and cooperative champions were key to bringing about cultural change in the short term. Early engagement with councillors was essential in introducing co-production to commissioning. In the long term, there will be changes to recruitment and cooperation will be part of everyone's job description.



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