

# Community Stakeholder Workshop

## for Newham's Democracy Commission

Wednesday 20 November 2019 - Canning Town Library and Community Neighbourhood Centre

### What was this workshop about?

Newham's independent Democracy Commission has been set up to look at the way that the council and local people work together, and how decisions which affect the local area get made. An important part of this process involves the Commission having conversations with local people about their needs and expectations.

This workshop was organised to get input from local people on how the Commission should go about doing this. A lot of activity is planned for January 2020 and the Commission wants to make sure that this activity is planned and designed so that it meets the needs of local people. This meeting is part of the process of making sure this happens.

The workshop also gave a chance to spread the word about the Commission and its work more generally.

The meeting was facilitated by Mat Basford and Andy Paice from the Democratic Society. The Democratic Society are an organisation that has been brought in to support the Commission in their work, and to help them to gather information and evidence from local people. The [Democratic Society](#) are working with another independent body, the [Centre for Public Scrutiny](#), to provide support and advice to the Commission.

### Who attended?

Invitations were sent out by email to local faith groups, voluntary sector groups, members of the community neighbourhood assembly working groups, co-production forum members, local tenants and residents associations. These people were invited because, at this stage in the project, the organisers felt that this range of people were best placed to help the Commission to understand how its work could be designed so as to make it accessible to and approachable by local people.

These were done in each of Newham's 8 Community Neighbourhoods by the neighbourhood managers, the Co-Production manager and Community Engagement Officer.

42 people from local community groups and organisations attended.

All of Newham's 8 Community Neighbourhoods were represented.

Representatives of the following groups were present:

- Ahmadiyya Muslim Association
- Bike from Boleyn Campaign
- Plaistow South Big Local
- Retail engagement
- Manor Park Library Book Club
- Shape Newham
- Canning Town Citizens Assembly Working Group
- Catch
- School 21
- Southern Road Primary Governor
- Forest Gate - several projects
- Newham Poetry Group
- Beckton Table Tennis Club
- Newham Poetry Group and Community Engagement East Ham
- Royal Dock Citizen Assembly working group
- Disability Rep Forum
- ASK user-led mental health group
- St Lukes Church
- Big South Local Plaistow
- Community Links
- HARP
- NSC
- Newham Chinese Association
- Royal Docks Community Voice
- Citizens Advice
- Keir Hardie Resident's Association

3 Community Neighbourhood managers

Newham's Co-production manager  
2 Senior Policy Officers

## **What happened in the meeting?**

- An explanation of what the Democracy Commission is doing and the kinds of things it is looking into was presented by Martha Haylett and Abdihaken Mohamed of Newham's Policy team. (Details about what the democracy commission is doing can be found at [newhamdemocracycommission.org](http://newhamdemocracycommission.org))
- The Democratic Society presented their early ideas about how they will organise the public events in January with the kinds of activities and events they are planning.
- There were conversations amongst those present with participants writing down feedback about the ideas presented.
- There was a question and answer session about anything that wasn't clear.
- Participants shared ideas for where, when and with who activities can be organised for the public events in January and how we can reach the borough's rarely heard voices.
- Feedback and Equalities forms were given out and people who wanted to stay involved with the Commission gave their contact details.

## **Responses from the Meeting**

### **Feedback responses**

When people gave their feedback to what they had heard about the Commission and its work, they said that:

- Quite short notice was given, but the process overall seemed good and the Commission had made a good start in its work. Some people, though, said that there was quite a lot of information to grasp, that the process felt quite manufactured and that it seemed as though a lot of decisions have been determined already;

- The way that the Commission goes about its work to engage local people has got to be inclusive, and there has to be transparency;
- The Commission will need to be clear what happens to the information and evidence that local people provide;
- Accessibility issues will need to be addressed in order to make sure that everyone has a chance to participate – some people raised concerns about the accessibility of the workshop itself;
- One of the areas that the Commission is going to be looking into is “co-production” – the way that the council and local people work together to design and develop policies. Some feedback at the workshop was that people wanted to be able to control this kind of process – for local people to be in charge of how this kind of process is designed rather than it being designed “for” them;
- People suggested that – in line with this – the work of the Commission itself should be co-produced according to four principles of:
  - Equality (and inclusivity)
  - Diversity
  - Accessibility
  - Reciprocity (that reward and recognition be given for work that the community does).

There were some questions about the Commission’s work more generally, which included:

- How the Commission was formed, and how its members were chosen;
- Why Newham residents weren’t involved in choosing the Commissioners;
- Why there aren’t 8 commissioners, to match the 8 community neighbourhood areas in the borough;
- How much the process will cost and how much Commission members are getting paid;
- What difference the Commission will make;
- How improving participation in local people will actually improve life for people in Newham;

- How the Commission is letting people know about its work and its future meetings;
- How groups will be encouraged to participate – taking into account language and digital barriers;
- Whether the public currently know things about local democracy – like who their local councillors are;
- Questions about definitions for certain terms, like the meaning of “participatory democracy”.

**The Commission has looked at a number of the issues raised above and you can find answers to these and other questions in the Frequently Asked Questions part of the website, here - <https://www.newhamdemocracycommission.org/faqs/>**

### **Making sure that the Commission’s work reaches all sections of the community**

The people at the workshop provided some ideas on how the Commission could make sure that its work draws on the thoughts of all sections of the community. People thought that this should include:

- Getting schools more involved;
- Reaching out to communities who do not register to vote;
- Reaching out to older people who may feel left behind;
- Working with the visually impaired, those with learning disabilities and the Deaf community, and with other disabled people;
- Talking to people who live on their own;
- Talking to people from East European communities;
- Talking to young people.

People also talked about the need to take account of the large number of languages spoken in Newham, and how to reach people who don’t speak English.

## **Work with the community in January 2020**

A lot of work is being planned for January 2020 – in particular, a two period in mid-January where a lot of events in the community will be held to encourage dialogue and discussion and for the Commission to listen and understand more about local people and their needs. The Commission know that they need to talk to people in the environment they find most comfortable rather than to suit the convenience of the Commission itself.

To support this work, people at the workshop were asked to fill in a template with ideas and suggestions for activities and events taking place in the borough, and the times and places for this kind of activity.

This resulted in a lot of information being shared about meetings held by or involving faith institutions, community centres, sports groups, charities, schools, food banks, shops and libraries. People at the workshop also volunteered to spread the word for the events.

**The Commission is doing more work to organise these events, and a full schedule will be published on the Commission's website – as well as being shared with those who came to the workshop.**