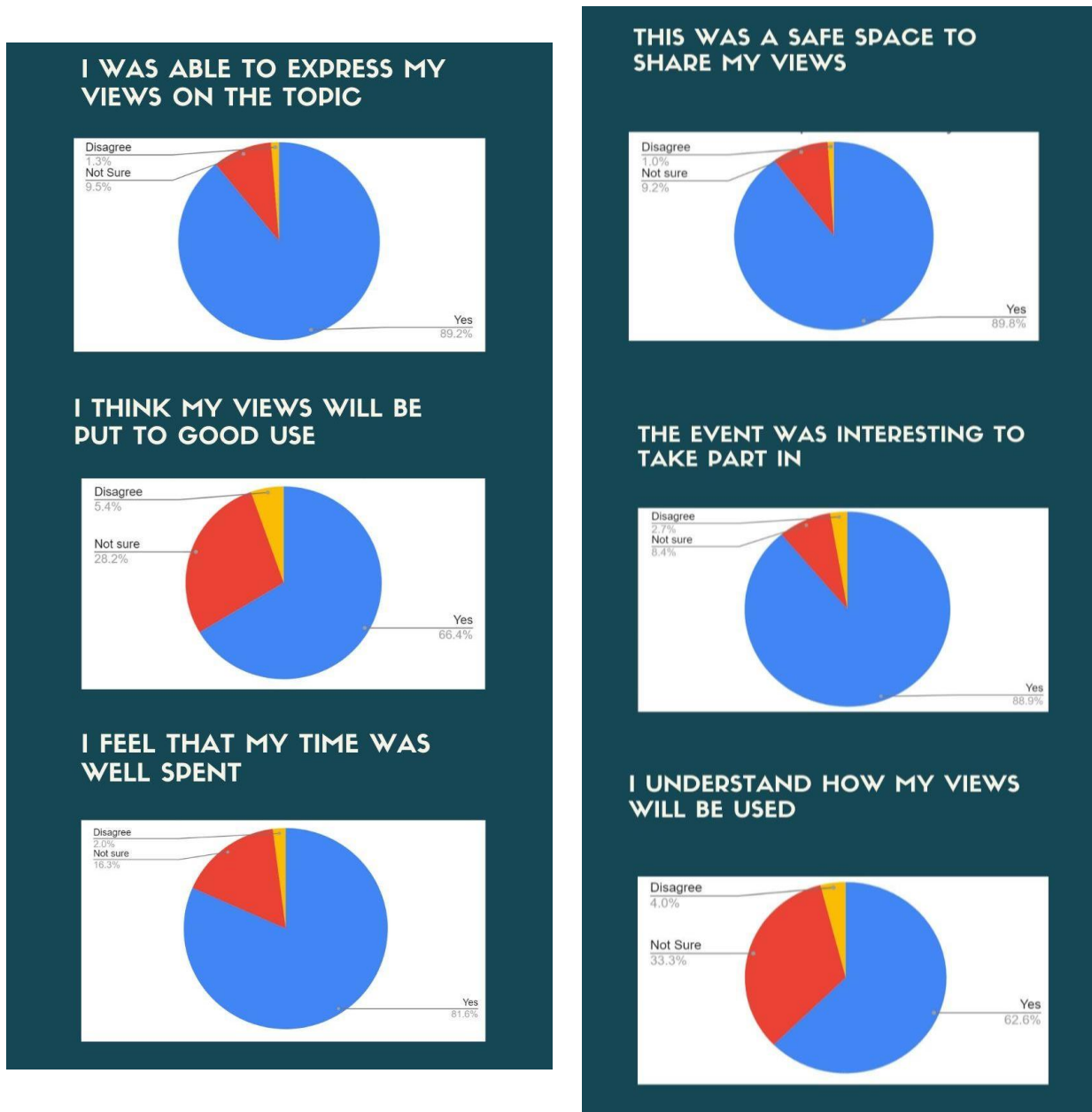


Newham Democracy and Civic Participation Commission: Public Engagement Evaluation

What did people think of sessions?

The charts below show how people responded to feedback form with 6 statements on. This was shown as a 'target' with participants asked to say whether they agreed with the following statements.

We used this at our public evening events, and at the community forum in Beckton, the 50+ men's group in Katherine Road Community Centre, the ESOL class in Plaistow, and Custom House library coffee morning. This doesn't cover everyone we spoke to but are events where we sat down with a group of participants for a longer period of time. We received 75 feedback forms in total.



The feedback form also gave people a chance to leave comments. We received only a small number of comments. People were positive about the experience of taking part, though felt there wasn't enough time to cover the whole topic. There were also comments about a lack of promotion for the Democracy Commission, and a number of comments expressing hope that input is taken on board and leads to change.

'Very good. Needed more time to go through other topics.'

'I was happy to participate today, and I hope Newham takes our views into consideration this time.'

'Good food, great participation from residents, very good council staff and other participants (Democratic Society and CFPS)'

'Do more promotion on the event and underline why it's important on the leaflet.'

'Need to emphasise that Newham is lucky to get to decide that system to adopt, other centres are not so lucky about it.'

There was not a facility for capturing feedback about the online platform, but some people did leave comments on the site expressing frustration about how it was set up. The site was separated into the six themes the Commission were examining, with an open format for commenting about these. There were concerns about this way of dividing up the content, that it was hard to use the site, and that it was hard to engage with this broad and unstructured approach.

*'This is a perfectly ghastly website a) There are *already* council silos on the front page, thus preventing capture of ideas that don't fit into the silos b) Operation is not intuitive, flashiness has been substituted for usability.'*

'This website consultation is terrible. Vague questions and too many sections.'

We also recorded some comments about the Democracy Commission process through our engagement events and the online platform.

There was some anxiety about how genuine the process would be, and whether it would lead to change. One person said they feared it would be a 'stitch up' to get the system the council wants while keeping the same people in power: '... there will be a "new" system but it will be a stitch up we'll have the same power structures...' Another comment expressed concern about how independent the commission would be, saying that: '...the council don't like things that go against them.' One person raised a concern that the Democracy Commission was happening prior to a referendum saying the Mayor '...has used her power and 29 councillors to overturn a motion on referendum for mayor 2020 to put in another motion to set up a Democracy Commission. This is unfair as the first motion was democratic. This is not fair.' One person emailed in to say they felt that money shouldn't be spent on the commission instead of other priorities.

We also heard concerns about having enough public education about governance choices before the planned referendum for this to be a genuine process, and concerns about there being low turnout in the referendum. There were also comments about needing more information about the current reality before looking at changes needed, and that it was hard to know what the council was already considering.

There were concerns that the Democracy Commission had been set up as a body of outside experts without involving residents more closely in this process. And there were demands for more transparency about this process, including how commissioners had been selected and how much it had cost. Some felt that the information shared to date was not clear enough. Similar comments were raised at the Community Stakeholder Event; these comments were captured in a write-up of the event.¹

'Democracy Commission an example of the council setting up something, choosing experts. Rather than involving residents in the design of this project itself.'

There were concerns that engagement events for the Democracy Commission had not been coordinated better with other council engagement events - a session on re-designing the council's website was happening close-by after a Democracy Commission coffee morning but these hadn't been linked up. There were also concerns about a lack of publicity for the Democracy Commission.

We also heard positive feedback during the sessions about having had the chance to sit down and talk about this topic in an open-ended way

'Citizen Assemblies problem was they just looked for answers. This opportunity to talk has been marvellous. Shame not more people here.'

There were some comments about what happens next, and how citizens will be involved. One person asked what the long-term plans are to avoid having to do this again. Another left the following comment online:

'I hope that the Commission Report due out in March 2020 is just the start of a bigger conversation and with solid recommendations about what can usefully be done now and what needs further research and development. One obvious way forward is to put the findings out to the community for their input into next steps rather than the usual launch party at which point public engagement ceases. How about the Mayor committing to developing 10 Ideas for Civic Participation 2020 via a set of capacity building and community wealth building projects and the commitment to use this to meet again and look back at what we have developed in partnership?'

In addition to the above, we also recorded our reflections on the engagement process from our facilitation team involving staff from Demsoc and CfPS, captured below.

¹ Community Stakeholder Workshop for Newham's Democracy Commission. Available online at: <https://www.newhamdemocracycommission.org/wp-content/uploads/Community-Stakeholder-Workshop-Wednesday-20-November-2019.pdf>

Information about who we spoke to

To monitor who we spoke to, we asked participants at the public evening events to share information about themselves with us using paper forms. We initially asked the same questions to people signing up for the online platform as an optional part of the sign-up form. We later removed this from the site to try and increase participation. Figures from these sources are shown below on the left.

During offline conversations we captured some basic information about people's age, gender and ethnicity. This was generally done during one on one conversations at either street stalls or drop-in events. In some cases, we asked people for this information, during other conversations we relied on our observations. This was not ideal but allowed us to make some very crude estimations to help us monitor our reach without asking too many questions during brief interactions. Where available these figures are shown below on the right. For comparison we've included some information about Newham's makeup underneath.

Which age group are you in?	Totals from Public Evening Events	Totals from Online Platform
Under 16	0	0
16-24	0	1
25-34	0	3
35-44	2	2
45-54	5	5
55-64	3	2
65- 74	5	3
75-84	4	1
85 and over	0	0
Total forms:	19	17

Age	Where recorded from offline conversations
Under 20	2
20s	6
30s	9
40s	5
50s	7
60s	4
70s	5
80+	1
Total recorded:	39

Gender	Totals from Public Evening Events	Totals from Online Platform
Female	9	6
Male	9	10
Prefer not to say	0	1
Prefer to self-describe	0	0
Blank	1	0

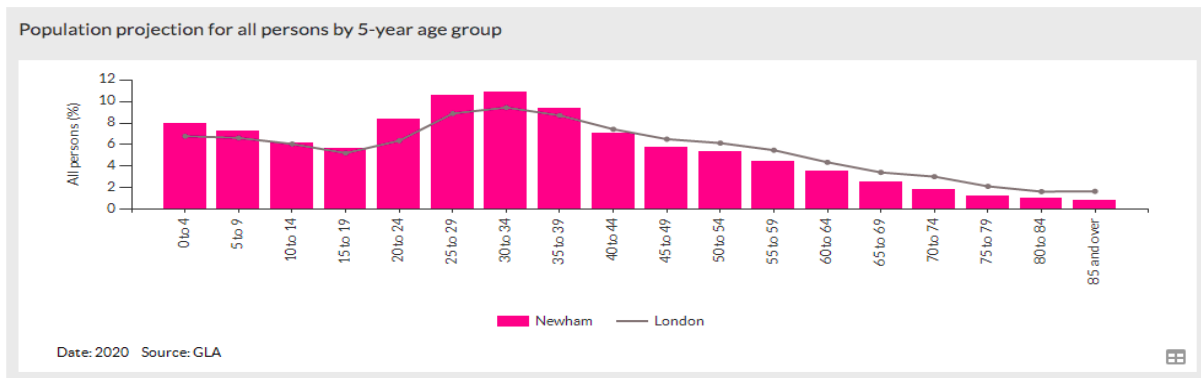
Gender	Where recorded from offline conversations
Female	28
Male	21

How would you describe your ethnic origin?	Totals from Public Evening Events	Totals from Online Platform
White - British	11	7
White - Irish	2	0
White - Polish	0	0
White - Lithuanian	0	0
White - Romanian	0	0
White - Other Eastern European	0	0
White - Any other White background	0	0
Mixed - White and Black African	0	0
Mixed - Black and White Caribbean	0	0
Mixed - White and Asian	0	0
Asian - Bangladeshi	0	1
Asian - British	1	0
Asian - Indian	0	0
Asian - Pakistani	0	1
Asian Sri Lankan Tamil	0	0
Asian - Chinese	0	0
Asian - any other Asian background	1	1
Black - British	1	0
Black - Caribbean	1	0
Black -African	0	1
Black - Nigerian	0	0
Other	1	1
Prefer not to say	1	2

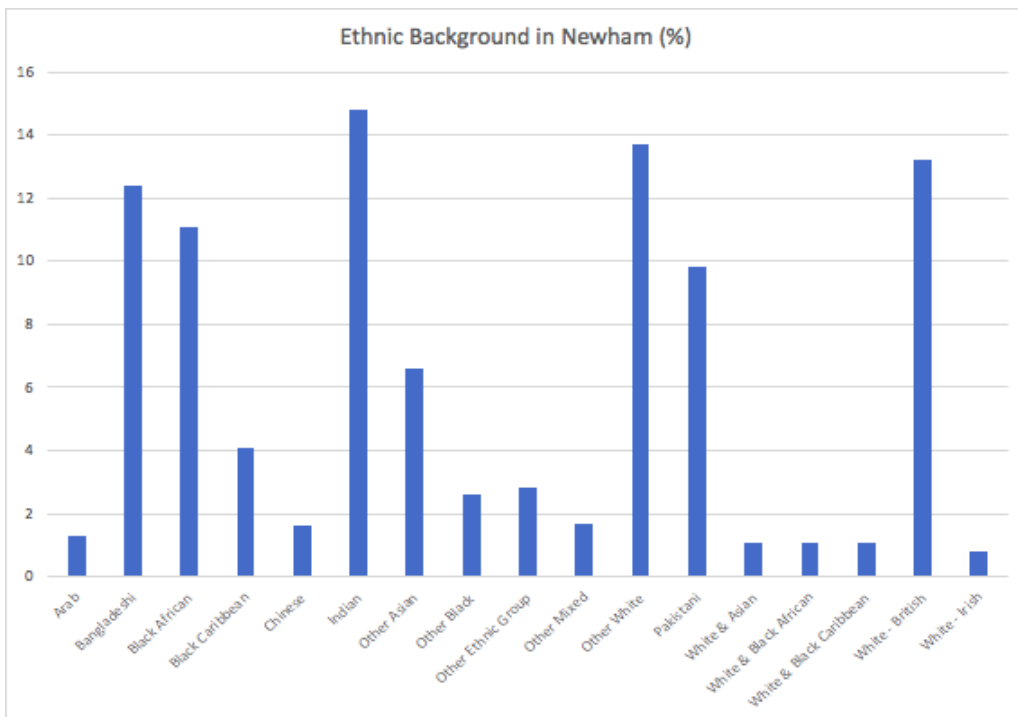
While we were not able to record detailed or precise information about the ethnicity of people we spoke to. We made some very rough observations about which broad sections of the population we were speaking to during these conversations. On this basis we estimated that during these one on one conversations a bit under a third of the people we spoke to were of Asian ethnicity, roughly a third of black ethnicity, and a bit over a third white ethnicity.

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?	Totals from Public Evening Events	Totals from Online Platform
Yes	2	1
No	5	12
Unsure	0	3
Prefer not to say	0	0
Blank	9	NA

Demographic profile of Newham, for comparison



Source: GLA. Data obtained from: <https://www.newham.info/population/>



The projected age profile of Newham. Taken from: <https://www.newham.info/population/>

More information about the demographic profile of Newham can be found online at:

<https://www.newham.info/newham-facts-and-figures/>

Facilitator Feedback Report

This Facilitator feedback aims to record what facilitators thought about engagement events, based on what they heard during the fortnight of events with people in Newham.

All content and quotes in this report are from facilitators. Feedback is from individuals who delivered the work, shared in debriefs as a team and also via online channels, after the events.

The purpose of reflection was to learn from participants and also the council staff supporting events, to refine what we were doing and improve our engagement methods to resonate with people and gather ideas for the Commission.

This feedback can be used as part of the overall engagement results report and as shared learning to inform future engagement work.

What went well?

1. Designing engagement

“Co-designing the event with the young people in Forest Gate was great and worked really well.”

2. Engagement

In general, a positive response and level of engagement from people during events, accompanying a generally positive response on evaluation forms.

“In practically every event people left feeling they'd had a positive experience of being listened to. Some spoke of the events as being 'therapeutic' or a rare occasion of being listened to. A couple of groups asked for us to come back.”

“In many of our 'on street' stalls, we would get abrupt answers like 'the council don't listen,' 'there's no point,' 'they've already made up their minds,' etc. I include this in the 'what went well' because this was the authentic feedback from local residents.”

3. Range of engagement

The amount and type of activity that took place was substantial and varied. Events where we 'piggy backed' existing groups were the most successful in terms of numbers and atmosphere.

“We used different formats and venues which worked well (mostly). I thought the drop-ins at the library worked well and we heard from a cross section of Newham's diverse community.”

4. Participants

We accessed a cross section of people.

“We engaged with a diverse range of groups and communities of varying ages, ethnicities, interest in the subject matter, speakers of other languages, people with learning disabilities in every community neighbourhood of the borough.”

5. Engagement process

We provided time and space for those who would not usually share thoughts on how they engage with the council and how the council engages with them on decision making.

Through the process, some people's awareness of the council was improved e.g. pointing out leaflets about councillors, 'I'll go and look at their website now I've spoken to you.'

We enabled some people to express frustration at the distance between their lives and those who make decisions about their lives, ranging from environmental concerns to access to life and death services.

"We had some very in-depth conversations at the evening world cafes (in spite of the low turnouts) and at the drop ins at the libraries."

What went less well?

Low turnout at the 'world cafe events' and on the online platform suggests the Democracy Commission has captured the interest of very few people in the borough.

Those who did come to those events were local active citizens well known by the council and officers.

The chair of the Commission, Nick Pearce, visited one of the sessions with young people, but otherwise there was no attendance from commissioners at the events.

Because the events were condensed into a very intense and short period, we had little time to debrief as a team and modify formats as we progressed.

It would have been great to be able to co-design the events with communities like we were able to do with the young people from Newham Citizens UK.

There were certain sections of the community we failed to reach, e.g. young professionals, Eastern Europeans, homeless people. We also could have made use of faith-based settings to reach a much wider section of the community.

For some of the groups we worked with we needed more than one session to first allow people to understand what we were doing and express frustrations at previous exclusion before exploring solutions.

At the co-production forum, some people said they felt that the commission was not co-designed, or transparent. They felt they were being asked to work on something without a chance to shape it.

More work was needed to break this broad, abstract topic of involvement down into something people could engage with better. Understanding existing practice and reviewing this would have helped this. It wasn't plugged into what is already happening.

The lack of engagement at world cafe and online could be about promotion and the appeal of the activities put forward, rather than just disinterest in the topic.