



## Community Leadership and Libraries Committee

31 October 2022

<b>Title</b>	<b>Together: The Barnet Community Participation Strategy 2022</b>
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<b>Wards</b>	All
<b>Status</b>	Public
<b>Urgent</b>	No
<b>Key</b>	No
<b>Enclosures</b>	Appendix 1. Barnet Community Participation Strategy 2022
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### Summary

The Community Participation Strategy 2022 sets out the principles and approaches that the council will take in putting the community at the heart of decision-making and service delivery. It also details four corporate 'pathfinder projects' through which the council will explore new ways of working and further its practice in participation, engagement and co-production.

### Officers Recommendations

1. That members approve the Community Participation Strategy
2. That members agree that the council adopt the principles set out in the strategy

## 1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

- 1.1 The latest version of the Community Participation Strategy was approved in June 2021. This strategy laid out how the council will work with residents, partners, and community groups on an ongoing basis in decision-making and service delivery. The decision was taken to refresh and update the existing strategy to reflect the council's focus on and commitment to community participation and co-production.

- 1.2 Many areas of the council already have a good track record of positive engagement with residents and communities across the borough. This strategy seeks to build upon this work and outlines key principles for all council departments and officers. These principles are aimed at ensuring that communities are equipped and empowered to take decisions that will solve local issues and ensure that they are able to thrive in their local area.
- 1.3 The Strategy Team has developed a delivery programme that sits behind this strategy. This details all the key community participation projects planned and underway. The team will monitor the progress of each of these projects and update committee where appropriate. This Community Participation Strategy focuses on four of these – the pathfinder projects. Committee chairs are encouraged to nominate their own pathfinder projects to be delivered within their portfolios.
- 1.4 At Policy and Resources Committee on 29 September, the outline for the new Corporate Plan was approved. This includes the emerging vision of Barnet as an engaged and effective that cares for people, our places and the planet. The Community Participation Strategy and accompanying delivery programme will enable the council to achieve this vision through working in partnership with the community.

## **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Approval for the strategy is required to begin delivering the work it proposes.

## **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED**

- 3.1 The alternative to this strategy is to continue to work according to the vision of the last strategy dated June 2021. This strategy was developed in accordance with the previous Barnet Plan 2021-2024 and, as such, is no longer aligned with the new priorities and vision of the council. Approval of this refreshed strategy will enable us to make sure that all our work feeds into the wider vision for the council.
- 3.2 To not approve the strategy means to not continue to develop and monitor our approach to community participation. This means that the council is less able to continue to develop positive relationships with the communities of Barnet and unable to build trust effectively. This puts us at risk of reputational damage as a council who imposes decisions on residents as opposed to taking a collaborative approach.

## **4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION**

- 4.1 Following approval, the council's Strategy Team will take forward its proposals. Some of this work will also be part of the council's Transformation Programme.
- 4.2 A report on the pathfinder projects will be brought back to committee in a year's time.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION**

### **5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance**

- 5.1.1 The Community Participation Strategy has been developed in line with the emerging Corporate Plan and will be a key way in which the council can realise its corporate vision. The Strategy and its outcomes will be reviewed on an ongoing basis in order to ensure continual learning and improvement.

### **5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

5.2.1 The strategy calls for a new approach to community participation that will require some additional resource to implement. This will be a budgeting decision for the service areas concerned, but corporate activities carried out by the Community Participation team will be funded from the budgets approved at Policy and Resources Committee on 19 July 2022 which aligned additional resources with the administration's priorities.

### **5.3 Legal and Constitutional References**

5.3.1 Under article 7 of the constitution this committee is responsible for general consultations and engagement policy not linked to projects under the terms of reference of other committees.

### **5.4 Insight**

5.4.1 Working with communities across Barnet is only possible with a comprehensive understanding of the communities that exist and their assets, resources and skills. Insight, therefore, is central to effective community participation. We will make sure to use existing and emerging insight and data to build this knowledge and inform our work with communities.

### **5.5 Social Value**

5.5.1 Social value runs through everything in this strategy. It proposes ways of working that unlock the assets in our communities, and harness these to create stronger, more cohesive communities whose needs are better served.

### **5.6 Risk Management**

5.6.1 Increasing community participation can carry some risks. These will be analysed and identified on an individual basis on projects with mitigation plans put in place.

### **5.7 Equalities and Diversity**

5.7.1 Pursuant to the Equality Act 2010, the council is under a legal obligation to have due regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act; advancing equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant 'protected characteristic' and those who do not share it; and fostering good relations between persons who share a relevant 'protected characteristic' and persons who do not share it. The 'protected characteristics' are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy, and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The council also has regard to the additional protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership even though this does not apply to certain parts of the public-sector equality duty.

5.7.2 The Community Participation Strategy actively advances equalities and diversity by helping ensure the council reaches and hears from a diverse cross-section of residents. Increasing resident engagement helps to ensure our services meets the needs of our communities.

## **5.8 Corporate Parenting**

5.8.1 The council expects partner organisations in the VCFS and private sectors to agree with our corporate parenting pledge and support our endeavours to raise outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.

## **5.9 Consultation and Engagement**

5.9.1 Consultation and engagement are fundamental to the Community Participation Strategy as it sets out how the council can have a closer and more productive dialogue with residents.

5.9.2 As part of a renewed focus on Community Participation, the Consultation and Engagement toolkit will be refreshed to improve functionality and accessibility and to better communicate the initiatives underway.

## **5.10 Environmental Impact**

5.10.1 None in the context of this report.

## **6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

6.1 Policy and Resources Committee 19 July - [Revised budget 2022/23 and Business Planning 2023-2027](#)

6.2 The previous [Community Participation Strategy](#) approved at Community Leadership and Libraries Committee in June 2021.

6.3 The most recent [Community Participation delivery plan update](#) to Community Leadership and Libraries Committee in January 2022.

# Together

The Barnet Community Participation  
Strategy 2022

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## Introduction

The Barnet Labour election manifesto set out a vision for Barnet to be a listening council that places community participation and engagement at the heart of everything we do; a council that cares about residents and enjoys a trusted and collaborative relationship with its communities.

Community participation means recognising that residents and community groups have the experience, skills and insight to be involved in work to improve their lives and environments. It means ensuring that the assets and power that rest within communities are unlocked and that when we design solutions for problems that communities face, we do this in partnership with them.

Barnet is home to a diverse population of residents and community groups. It's one of the great strengths of our borough - communities that care about each other and the places where they live. We saw this especially during the Covid pandemic, that every day our schools, businesses, green spaces, and local services are all enhanced by the contribution made by people participating in the civic life of the borough. We want to grow this participation and enable more residents to become active citizens.

Good community participation will enable the council to continue to better tackle the gaps and inequalities that residents face. We will be inclusive in our engagement and seek to reach out and involve communities who are less often heard. We will ensure that all Barnet's communities feel celebrated, listened to and included.

There are already many examples around the council of where we are successfully involving the community through stakeholder engagement and co-production. Now, as the council enters a period of significant transformation, we will learn from these examples and from expertise in other organisations to make an organisation-wide commitment to putting communities at the heart of everything we do.

This strategy outlines the principles and approaches that we will commit to in order to achieve this.

## What we mean by community participation

### What is community?

There are many ways of understanding communities but when we talk about communities, we usually mean one of two things:

- Communities of place – a community of people who are bound together because of where they live, work or visit
- Communities of interest – a community of people who share similar interests.

Some communities can be both a community of place and interest, for example a local football club. Faith communities share culture and beliefs but can also be strongly linked to a place of worship or country of origin.

The many communities that make up Barnet are diverse and are formed around a variety of interests and places. We acknowledge that a key priority for the council is to better understand these communities and the people who belong to them so that we can reach them and engage with them more meaningfully.

### What is participation?

Participation in the context of this strategy is the involvement of communities in the design and delivery of projects that solve local issues or bring benefits and improvements to their environments. When the council refers to community participation, we mean the extent to which a community or a group of people has been actively involved in the work we are doing in the borough. We know that different communities will participate to varying degrees at different times, and we want to make sure that we are encouraging the most meaningful participation at the

right time with the appropriate communities. Where possible, we want to ensure that the residents and communities of Barnet have as much agency as possible in resolving the issues that affect them.

### What are the benefits of community participation?

Involving residents and communities in our decision-making enables communities to have a say in determining the future of their local area and gives them confidence that their say matters. In addition to this, ongoing community participation enables us to build trust with the community and in doing so we are then better placed to have open, transparent conversations about the options and resources available and why some actions may not work as well as others. We know that this is a much better approach than simply consulting on decisions that have already been taken. It also generates better outcomes.

Greater community participation can also lead to improved health and wellbeing for our residents. Encouraging residents to participate in community life, build social connections, invest in supportive relationships, and have a say in local decisions are all factors that contribute towards good health. In addition to this, entrenched health inequalities are best addressed in partnership with the community and participatory approaches towards service delivery directly address the perceptions of powerlessness felt by some communities. Furthermore, a community-centred approach supports our preventative agenda. By working with communities, we are better able to address the wider determinants of health, and the precursors of more serious issues.

Finally, community participation is good for our democracy. We want the residents and communities that make up the borough to have confidence in us as an approachable, open, and honest local authority and to have trust in the processes that we put in place.

## The story so far...

For some parts of the council, engaging communities in decision-making and service delivery is not new thinking. The case studies below are just a few examples of how a community-led approach is already shaping our services.

### My Say Matters

Barnet's Family Services department places the voice of children and young people at the heart of its work, and most recently the department launched the My Say Matters Strategy. This strategy was developed using an initial survey with 500 young people and then a series of focus groups to further develop our understanding into their perspectives. Equality, diversity and inclusion are fundamental to the strategy and so the involvement of racially minoritised, migrant and LGBTQ+ communities, disabled children and other marginalised groups was actively sought. Continuous engagement has taken place over summer 2022 with young people who were keen to stay involved and who will continue to play a key role in the delivery and evaluation of the strategy.

### Town Teams

The Town Centres team provides support for volunteer neighbourhood networks called Town Teams which help to steer local place making. In total there are 30 Town Teams in Barnet, with some more active than others. Some have received funding from the council as well as external grants and have then gone on to develop their own local plans.

In Finchley Central, a regeneration project is underway to improve the public realm in the town centre and well-established local group the Finchley Society were engaged to develop a strategy for the area. The group have set out their priorities for the local area and identified resourcing and funding for a range of projects and events. Meanwhile in Chipping Barnet, the Town Team has successfully bid for money from the Mayor of London to fund their

local strategy and have been actively involved in appointing consultants to help shape the regeneration work in the local area. The team has its own website which shares information about how to get involved, as well as current projects and activities happening in the local area. This includes recently launching a pop-up workshop and retail space where local people can grow their business and work towards a longer-term home on the High Street.

In Burnt Oak, a Community Steering Group had been formed, consisting of local residents, businesses, and community stakeholders. This group has enabled a co-design approach to be used for local projects. This has included creative placemaking where arts, culture and design practice are used to make community-led improvements to a neighbourhood.

### Adult social care co-production

The Adults and Health directorate involves service users and providers in several ways, a key example of this is People's Voice. This is a forum of 200 residents, many of whom are users of adult services, as well as carers and older residents. People's Voice provides those who have experience of adult services in Barnet with the opportunity to have a say, attend events and represent the community on the Involvement Board. This board, made up of representatives from 12 community groups, oversees and advises on engagement approaches and helps teams to think about how to engage in meaningful ways with different types of people.

In addition to this, throughout 2022 Adults and Health have been developing an Engagement and Co-production Strategy. This will include a charter committing the service to increasing and widening its co-production and setting out what service users can expect from the council.



## Friends of Parks

Barnet's Green Spaces Network brings together Barnet's Friends of Parks groups and is a good example of community power. These groups are completely led by residents who manage their own governance and invite the council to quarterly meetings. The council acts as a bridge, an enabler and information source. For example, the network recently asked for training in certain greening initiatives, which the council is working with the network to develop. The council also connected the network to Middlesex University to help design a website. The council agreed to fund the platform to enable better communications across the groups and better sharing of knowledge and information between them.

Barnet's Greenspaces and Leisure team works closely with the network and individual friends groups when planning or developing improvements. For example, the council has recently been developing new play area designs and the friends groups have been engaged throughout the design and consultation process in order to ensure the playgrounds meet the needs of the local communities.

## The internal Community Participation Review and our transformation journey

During the summer of 2022, an internal review of community participation was undertaken across the council. The aims of this work were twofold:

- To gain an understanding into the engagement and participation practice currently undertaken by the organisation
- To understand the gaps in our community engagement, and which communities we are reaching less.

In order to gain an understanding into the participation work that is already ongoing, a series of focus groups and workshops were held with staff, including several one-on-one interviews. In addition to this, an online map was created where staff could input information about communities,

organisations and assets they knew of in locations around the borough. Staff were also invited to map any communities they are either engaged with or may be aware of and not reaching. This map is still live and the collation of data on it is ongoing.

The Community Participation Review concluded with a series of recommendations that will enable the council to strengthen its approach towards community participation. These included:

- Develop a toolkit with practical tips and learning resources, case studies and best practices from within the organisation and elsewhere. Tools will be accessible, practical, and flexible so that people can use them and adapt them as they see appropriate.
- Establish a community of practice made up of professionals within the organisation. This will be a task-oriented learning space to design and test participation approaches.
- Consider the role of the Community Participation team in Strategy and Resources as the corporate hub for this work.
- Develop the Citizen's Panel and toolkit, while providing advice on participation approaches as well as delivering corporate and cross-cutting initiatives.
- Further strengthen our links with the VCFSE sector and learn from their insight and skills.

Many of these recommendations will feed into the community participation strand of the council's new Transformation programme but will also form part of a complex work programme managed by the Community Participation team. This will track all major participation and engagement projects planned and underway across the organisation.

## Our principles

The Community Participation Strategy proposes five principles that the council should adopt to ensure we are community-led in our service delivery and design. These principles have been informed by the extensive staff consultation carried out as part of the Community Participation Review.

### 1. We go where people are

It is not enough to expect residents to engage with us. We need to reach out to them. Our commitment to community participation includes making sure that all residents can contribute meaningfully and fairly, regardless of socio-economic background, ethnicity, sex, age, sexual orientation, or disability. To do this, we recognise that we can reach different groups most effectively by going to them. We will:

- Engage residents in the places they feel safe, comfortable, and familiar
- Keep it local and work at neighbourhood level
- Target specific groups and communities to ensure that all can contribute
- Ensure that solutions are tailored to meet local needs wherever possible

### 2. We learn through doing

While there are already many good examples of community participation in the council, we know that we still have much to learn. We want to develop our expertise and refine our approaches. There is no better way of doing this than by practical action. We know that learning through doing is the best way in which we can progress and develop our work with the community. We will:

- Test our approaches through pilot projects
- Evaluate and measure our impact with residents and use the learning to improve and refine our approaches
- Iterate, adapt and change as we learn

### 3. We listen

The most effective way for us to meet the needs of Barnet's diverse communities is to first ensure that we listen to their insights, experiences and needs first hand. And not just listen but *hear*. This means that we will:

- Seek the views of all our communities; particularly young people, minoritised groups and those less often heard
- Hear, respond, and discuss
- Engage in an ongoing dialogue through the lifecycle of a service, project or initiative. From design through to completion

### 4. We are transparent, accessible, and open

We want residents to be confident that they can trust us to deliver on our promises, and act with integrity and honesty. We will also be honest about what we cannot change and explain the reasons why. We want to make sure that we make it as easy as possible for residents to engage in our democracy and decision-making and to make our information accessible. This means that we will:

- Encourage participation in our policymaking and democracy
- Take care to communicate our decisions in an accessible way
- Be honest and take steps to communicate the 'why' behind our decisions

## 5. We value community power

Community power means residents, community groups and businesses are enabled to utilise their skills and assets to work together on improving their local area. It is about unlocking the potential that residents and community groups already have to effect change; enabling community leadership and removing the barriers that might be obstructing this. To make this happen, we will:

- Empower our communities and enable them to lead
- Celebrate our diverse communities and their cultures
- Embed practices of co-design throughout the organisation and take a participatory approach towards designing solutions, treating communities as partners.
- Work with organisations in the VCFSE sector as partners and enablers of community action
- Strengthen volunteering across the borough

## How we will achieve this: our approaches

The levels of community participation are often expressed as a ladder, with the top rung usually being co-production or community power. What this model doesn't reflect is that a project can often involve several different types of engagement at the same time. For the Community Participation Strategy, we have chosen to show four key approaches as quadrants on a wheel.

### Communicating

Giving people access to information remains a critical part of engagement and is an important way of inviting people to participate.

### Partnership

Working with communities in partnership to find solutions to challenges and developing these together. Thinking about creative ways to codesign, co-produce and co-deliver.



### Consulting

Consultation is an important form of engagement but should not be the only approach. Sometimes we need to test our thinking with stakeholders, but this should be done from the beginning and throughout a project - not just at the end.

### Community leadership

Communities taking the lead on changes they want to see through activism and organising around an issue. They might then seek out support from the council to help facilitate or enable these changes.

## Pathfinder Projects

Following the principle of learning through doing, we have chosen four specific projects through which we will test our approaches and model our principles over the coming 12 months. They each take the council into new territory where we can build on our existing strengths but develop in new directions. These pieces of work have been chosen because they are corporate and cross-cutting but they do not represent the full picture. A comprehensive programme of community participation projects is underway across the council, and committee chairs are encouraged to nominate their own pathfinder projects from among these.

### Pathfinder project 1: Leader Listens events

The Leader of the council has expressed an intention to personally engage with residents. He wants to listen and hear from people around the borough to find out what their concerns, suggestions and views might be.

Whereas similar events in the past have been held as open sessions in council premises, these events will be targeted to specific communities. They will focus on less heard voices and communities for whom council services have a disproportionate impact. For example:

- Young people with special educational needs and disabilities
- Minoritised ethnic communities
- Adults with disabilities
- Refugees, asylum seekers and other new arrivals

The findings from these sessions will be evaluated and fed into further work that can be co-produced with the groups involved.

### Pathfinder project 2: Citizens Assembly on Climate Change and Biodiversity

Increasing sustainability and achieving our net-zero goals are major priorities for the council and an assembly on this topic was a specific manifesto pledge from the new administration. This will be Barnet's first experience of a deliberative assembly focused on a single theme. An external agency has already been commissioned and the assembly is scheduled to run in early 2023.

The Citizens Assembly will provide a deliberative platform to engage with residents to co-produce the forthcoming Sustainability Strategy and associated Climate Action Plan. We will use a third-party agency to run the assembly, which will comprise 40 people randomly sampled from Barnet's population. The assembly members will be remunerated for their work which will involve at least 30 hours of facilitated deliberation. In these sessions the sustainability issues facing Barnet - and their solutions - will be explored in detail.

The outcomes of the Citizens Assembly on Climate Change and Biodiversity will inform the development of the full Sustainability Strategy and subsequent action plan later in 2023.

### **Pathfinder project 3: Arts and Culture Strategy**

There are numerous benefits to growing arts and culture in the borough. Firstly, it makes good economic sense; in recent years, the creative industries have often been the UK's fastest growing sector. A better cultural offer in the borough will also boost our visitor economy and help Barnet become a destination borough. Arts and culture also contribute to fun and wellbeing and can provide a wealth of opportunities for residents to get involved - both as consumers and participants.

Barnet Labour made it a manifesto pledge that Barnet bids to be London Borough of Culture in 2026. Achieving this will require a whole-borough approach led from the grass roots up. The Arts and Culture Strategy therefore presents an ideal opportunity for co-production. Barnet is home to thousands of artists, makers, and musicians, while the council are well represented on the cultural education partnership - Barnet & Culture for Youth - there has been little coordinated support for the wider cultural and creative industries sector for some time.

Coming from this position, it is vital therefore that development of the Arts and Culture strategy is led by Barnet's existing creative and cultural communities. They are the experts in what is needed, and it is the role of the local authority to harness this expertise and empower them as partners in developing a plan to grow the arts, cultural and creative industries in Barnet. We also need to understand what 'culture' means to our residents and what they would want to see included in a strategy. In doing so, we will showcase the benefits of fully co-producing a strategy.

We will also explore the use of fun and creative engagement methods in capturing stakeholders' views. The process will take a year, with an aim to publish the strategy in the Autumn of 2023. The strategy will not only provide a plan for the long-term development of culture and creativity in the borough, it will also set out a roadmap for a London Borough of Culture bid for 2026.

### **Pathfinder project 4: Empowering grassroots community action**

One of the key outcomes the 2021 Community Participation Strategy has been the establishment of the Barnet Together Alliance. Developed over several years, the partnership came together with the council in a new collaborative alliance following the successful joint working in the community response to Covid-19. Another phenomenon of the pandemic was the rise of neighbourhood-level community action. Whether this was through the various mutual aid groups that sprang up or people connecting on WhatsApp and Facebook, in the face of the crisis people came together to help each other in ways that had not been seen in recent years.

Since launching in early 2022, the Alliance has sought to extend its reach and engagement across the VCFSE and has worked to ensure the health and sustainability of the sector. A priority for the coming 12 months will be to ensure that as well as a healthy sector, the borough has a healthy civic ecosystem. This means ensuring that there are opportunities for people to participate in their community at whatever level they choose, and structures in place to grow this participation into more formal, constituted organisations if they choose to.

It also includes working more effectively with other statutory partners such as Health. Sharing the skills and assets we hold in the council and VCFSE to support health partners to increase resident participation and engagement. This will be able us to better address health inequalities.

During the pandemic, numbers registering with BTA's Volunteering Barnet service nearly doubled. However, the results of the latest Adult Resident Perception Survey suggested that overall volunteering had halved in the borough since 2020. A new Volunteering Strategy will be published in November. This strategy will enable us to raise the profile of volunteering, invest in and reward volunteers and improve recruitment and retention of volunteers.