

Evaluation of Camden Council's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis

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Contents

Introduction	3
Context	3
What is a Citizens’ Assembly?.....	3
‘The year of the citizens’ assembly’	3
Camden’s Citizens’ Assembly on the Climate Crisis.....	4
Evaluation Methodology	5
Evaluation Framework.....	5
Evaluation Methods.....	6
Analysis	7
Findings	8
Mapping and Understanding the Process.....	8
Inception	8
Planning and Development.....	9
Wider Engagement	9
Implementation	9
Translation and Feedback	10
Policy Plan	10
Outputs	12
Outcomes.....	13
Learning	15
Institutional capacity.....	15
Content	18
Structure and timing	22
Managing expectations.....	25
Participation and Agency	28
Engagement to Action.....	32
Discussion & Concluding Remarks	36
Final Recommendations for Decision Makers	38
Appendix 1: Evaluation Framework.....	40
Appendix 2: Interview Guides.....	41
Appendix 3: Identification Codes.....	42

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Introduction

This report outlines the evaluation of Camden Council's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis. The report aims to provide an in-depth, critical analysis of its processes and outcomes. The evaluation drew on a range of methods (observations, interviews, focus groups, surveys, document analysis) to understand stakeholders' experiences of the citizens' assembly, exploring what worked well, and drawing out suggestions and recommendations for future participation and engagement activities led by Camden Council.

Context

What is a Citizens' Assembly?

A citizens' assembly is a representative group of citizens who are selected at random from the population to learn about, deliberate upon, and make recommendations in relation to a particular issue or set of issues. It is one of a number of methods of public participation in decision-making used by governments and policymakers. The International Association for Public Participation's Public Participation Spectrum conceptualises the five roles that the public play in decision making – informing, consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment – with their level of power and influence increasing as the spectrum progresses. The method(s) chosen for specific participation exercises should relate to the goal and the degree of power ceded to participants during the process. Citizens' assemblies sit under 'collaboration', as they involve a level of decision-making, but their conclusions are advisory rather than binding. They are most often used for complex or contested issues, providing an opportunity to build consensus and legitimacy around difficult decisions.

There are no internationally recognised standards for citizens' assemblies, but there are some generally accepted principles, including:

- a three step process - learning, deliberation and decision making – each given sufficient time
- independent facilitation
- oversight by an independent advisory group
- presentation by experts covering the range of views and evidence on the topic(s) discussed
- demographically representative participants drawn from the wider population the assembly relates to
- reimbursement of participants in recognition of their time and contribution

'The year of the citizens' assembly'

This method of deliberative democracy has been used in the UK and around the world and has become an increasingly popular tool at a time of political polarisation and distrust. Perhaps the most famous example is Ireland's 2016-18 assembly, which tackled a range of issues including abortion. Citizens' assemblies have become an increasingly popular tool in a time of political polarisation and distrust. According to Involve, 2019 is shaping up to be the 'year of the citizens' assembly', with 18 assemblies

completed, ongoing or announced, at national and local levels.¹ Of these, 10 are specifically about climate change, including the first ever UK-wide citizens' assembly, set to begin in January 2020. This follows the declaration of a climate emergency by numerous local authorities and national governments, including the UK parliament.

The complexity, urgency and all-encompassing nature of climate change, and the impact of any policies to mitigate it, make it an obvious topic for a citizens' assembly. Additionally, it is one of the three demands of the increasingly influential international activist movement Extinction Rebellion (XR). They state that "because they are informed and democratic... Citizens' Assembly's decisions will provide political cover and public pressure for politicians to set aside the usual politicking and do the right thing."

Camden's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis

Camden Council's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis was the first of these to take place, in July 2019. Camden Council has a strong culture of resident engagement and consultation, and a history of using deliberative democracy. The Camden 2025 Vision emphasises the need for residents, businesses and the council to "try out new tools for collaborating" and "radically change the way we work together", and was itself based on the results of an engagement programme which included a citizens' assembly in 2017. The Council also held a citizens' assembly to discuss the future of the area around Euston station in 2018, and have been experimenting with co-design projects and neighbourhood assemblies.



¹ <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/news/keeping-citizens-assemblies> Accessed 16/08/2019

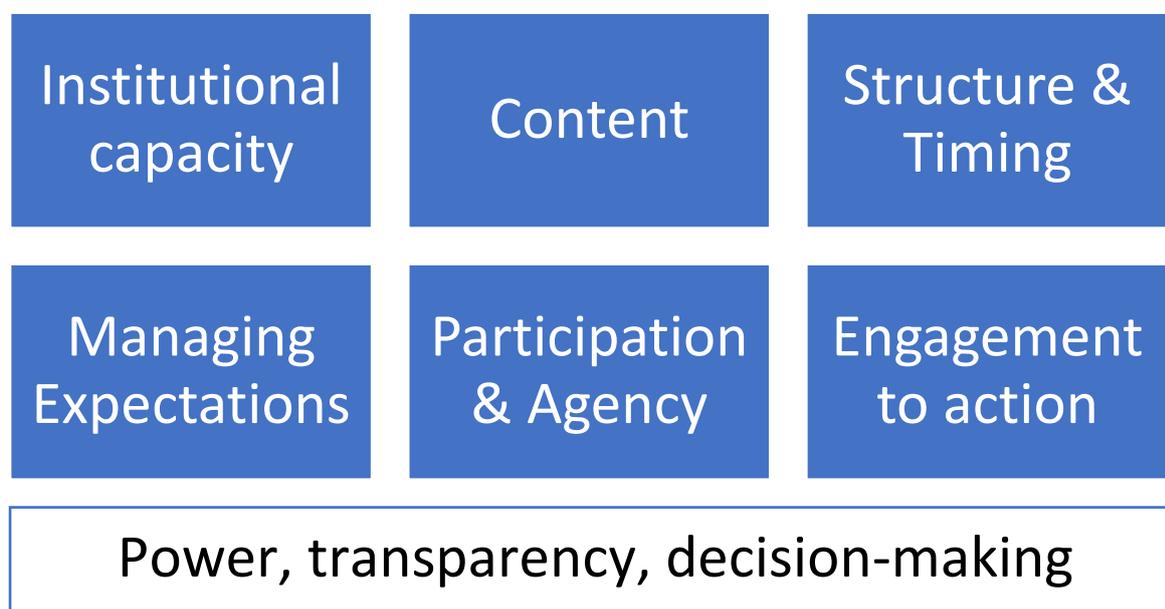
Evaluation Methodology

Evaluation Framework

The evaluation of Camden Council’s Citizens’ Assembly was undertaken by the Evaluation Team at UCL, who support and evaluate engagement and participation activities. . It was led and executed by the Evaluation Manager, with support and guidance from the Head of Evaluation. The evaluation specifically focused on the processes and outcomes of the assembly, with the aims of creating an evidence base for learning and strategic planning for Camden Council. The evaluation focused on participants’, policy makers’ and other actors’ experiences in the process.

The monitoring and evaluation process was shaped by an evaluation framework (simplified in Figure 1, outlined in detail Appendix 1) which draws out the potential factors that influenced the process and outcomes of the citizens’ assembly, in relation to its planning, implementation and impact. These are grouped into cross-cutting themes, underpinned by the concepts of **power, transparency and decision making**. These have been identified through a brief literature search on citizens’ assemblies, expertise and understanding of engagement and policy processes, and initial discussions with the project delivery team to establish the context of the assembly within Camden Council. The evaluation framework provided the structure and skeleton for the evaluation approach.

Figure 1: Camden’s Citizens’ Assembly on the Climate Crisis: Evaluation Framework



Due to the timeline of the evaluation it is important to note that the evaluation findings and this report present a snapshot of the processes and outcomes from the citizens’ assembly – we acknowledge that the project is still ongoing, policies are still in development, and outcomes may take months (and even years) to materialise.

Evaluation Methods

The evaluative research for Camden's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis took place between July and October 2019 (starting at the first workshop and ending when the assembly process and outcomes were presented to councillors), adopting a mixed methodological approach incorporating qualitative research techniques, including:

- Document collation and review, i.e. project proposals, project presentations, independent reports, meeting notes, participant feedback forms, online comments, newspaper articles and participant comments;
- Semi-structured interviews with a sample of project stakeholders including the delivery team, assembly participants, facilitators, and advisory group;
- Focus group with sample of assembly participants;
- Surveys completed by participants and assembly speakers;
- Structured observations of assembly sessions, internal review meetings, an advisory group meeting and the full Council meeting.

Initial stakeholder analysis of the project identified 8 groups of project stakeholders (i.e. those involved in the planning and delivery of the project):

- Camden Council staff involved in planning and delivery – Sustainability and Strategy and Change teams, and key councillors;
- Camden Council staff involved in facilitation of the assembly
- Camden Council's Community Researchers involved in recruitment and support of participants
- Partner organisations, including Involve and The Democratic Society
- External facilitators
- Advisory group members
- Assembly speakers
- Assembly members (participants)

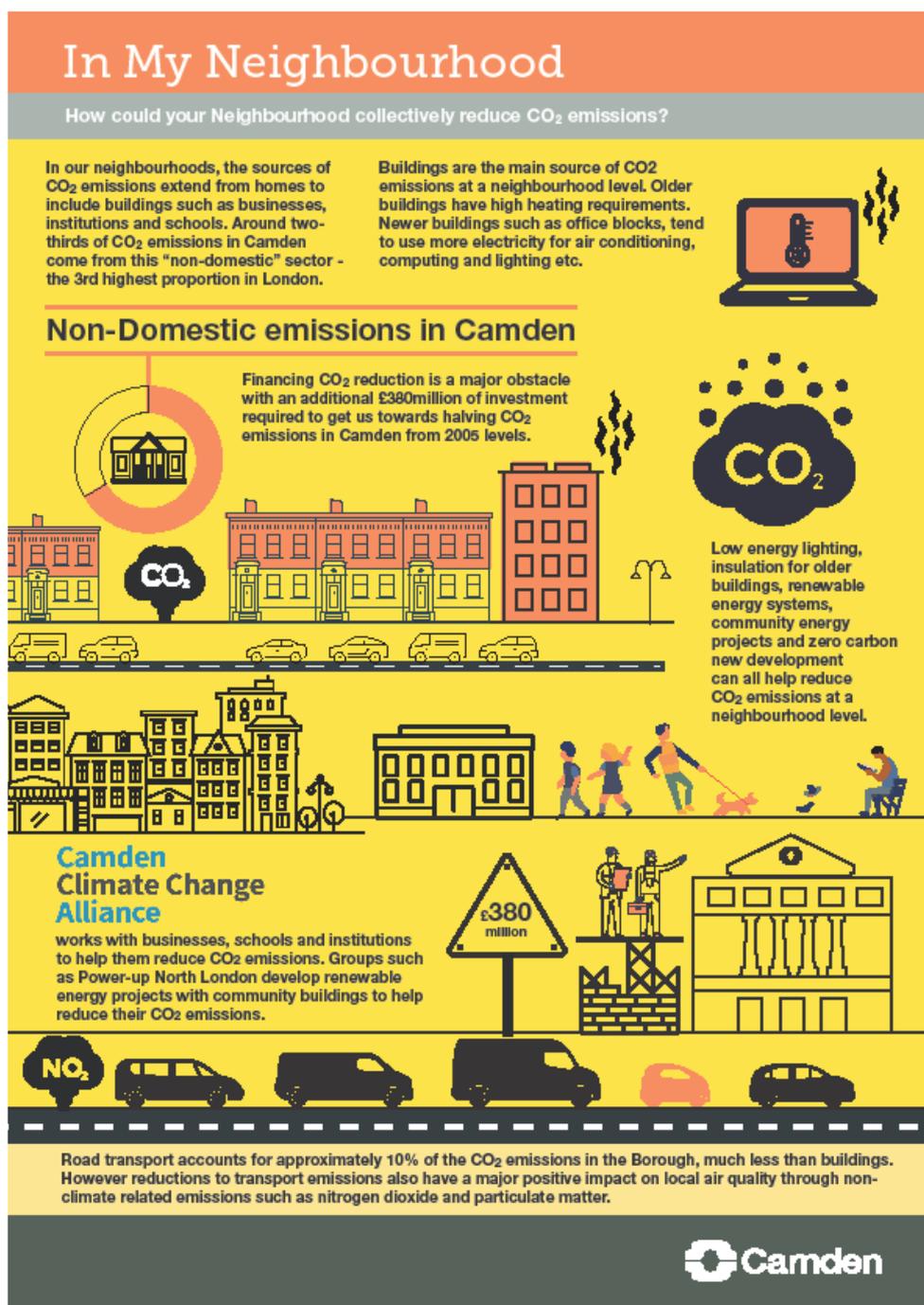
60 stakeholders were approached to be involved in the evaluation and 31 agreed to participate.

22 interviews were undertaken in total (14 face-to-face, and 8 over the phone); 3 stakeholders were involved in a focus group, and 6 stakeholders were involved in email correspondence following directive evaluative questions. Data from the feedback forms completed by 49 assembly members was also obtained.

Participants were given an information sheet and verbal explanation about the purpose and scope of the evaluation, and asked to read and sign a Consent Form. The interviews were based on a number of general questions about the project, made specific to the participants' role (see example interview guide in Appendix 2). To ensure anonymity each participant was given a reference identification code relating to their role (e.g. P1, F2) which were subsequently used to label all data pertaining to each interview (see Appendix 3 for more detail).

Analysis

A qualitative thematic analysis approach was undertaken to search for themes in the documents, transcripts and notes. A number of predefined themes or codes, linked to the evaluation framework, were used to tag segments of data, then the data was sorted and grouped into the separate categories, and overarching themes. Analysis involved a process of reading, coding, re-reading and re-coding the data. However, it is important to note, the analysis framework evolved during data collection and analysis (i.e. after re reading transcripts or conducting more interviews), to include emergent themes from the data gathered.



Findings

Mapping and Understanding the Process

The assembly itself was only one part of the overall process of Camden Council's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis. Through the observations and interviews, it was possible to identify six distinct, yet interlinked stages which encompass the steps taken in the planning and implementation of the citizens' assembly. Within this section we construct a model to summarise the council's approach, and explain the goals, activities and the underpinning processes for the effective delivery of each stage, drawn from the evaluation findings.

It is important to acknowledge the interconnections between stages and the iterative nature of the assembly process. Although the model provided in Figure 2 outlines it as a linear process, there were numerous feedback loops between each of the steps and stages. Additionally, this model should not be considered in isolation. Behind these stages lie a range of attitudes, expectations and intentions influencing the 'whys' which underpin the 'hows', explored further below. The 'Learning' and 'Discussion' sections of this report explore the impact of the decisions made during each stage.

Inception

Camden Council's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis started with the identification of the 'need' for a citizens' assembly, including the development of a framing question. The decision to hold the assembly came from the Leader of the Council, Cllr Georgia Gould, and Cllr Adam Harrison, Cabinet Member for Sustainability. Gould is a passionate advocate of citizens' assemblies, especially in an area as diverse as Camden, where "some voices get heard louder than others" (C1), and had been looking to expand the model across the council's activity. Calls to action from groups such as XR and Climate Emergency Camden and the momentum behind climate change as an issue, combined with the need to renew to council's 10 year sustainability plan, led to the decision to choose this as the topic for the borough's next citizens' assembly. Cllr Harrison began the process of declaring a climate emergency and instigating preparation for the assembly, intended to set the direction for Camden's 2020 Climate Action Plan, in May 2019.

At this stage, a core project team of officers and political representatives was formed, including by staff from the Sustainability, Strategy and Change, and Communication teams, as well as Cllr Harrison, and Cllr Gould.

"When the climate emergency declaration was made, we thought that climate would be an interesting issue to undertake a Citizens' Assembly [CA] on – and bring together the issue with the CA process.... An assembly on climate also matched with calls from groups like Extinction Rebellion (XR), so it seemed like a good match overall Georgia had the vision and we just got on and did it, which involved mobilising others to be involved." CT1

Clear leadership and cross-departmental team-working supported the development of project governance structures, including compliance with internal policies and processes such as sign-off via a Cabinet Members Briefing.

Planning and Development

The purpose of the ‘planning and development’ stage was to form a comprehensive approach for the citizens’ assembly. This involved significant background research, consultation with key partners and the establishment of an advisory group with external representatives from a range of organisations and sectors (i.e. UCL and BurroHappold). This was a key stage within the citizens’ assembly timeline as it involved setting the foundations for the process, including the commissioning of Involve.

Work during this stage focused on building a “*common understanding of the citizens’ assembly*” (CT1) including defining its boundaries and scope, and specific details such as the selection and invitation of speakers, content of sessions, etc. The advisory group played a key role in this, as did dialogue between Involve and the project team, bringing diverse perspectives and internal and expertise to the assembly’s development.

Wider Engagement

Wider engagement was undertaken by Camden Council through multiple methods (including community meetings, school workshops, and the development of an online platform). These methods aimed to ensure the involvement of a larger group of Camden’s population than the assembly itself could.

A key activity within this stage was the recruitment of members for the citizens assembly, which was managed by the Strategy and Change team and undertaken by the council’s Community Researchers. They had face to face conversations with people to explore if they were interested in being involved, using a short survey to gauge attitudes around climate and collect demographic data to ensure that there was a representative group of Camden residents in the room (ethnicity, gender, housing tenure, ward of residence, age group). The Community Researchers also drew upon some of the people who were involved in the 2018 citizens’ assembly focusing on the Camden 2025 strategy.

An additional aspect of this wider engagement was in response to external circumstances; the council developed a set of FAQs, outlining the assembly process following public and private criticism from XR.

Implementation

This stage relates to the delivery of the citizens’ assembly itself, which consisted of three assembly meetings, taking place over two evenings and one day. Other activities included checking in with assembly members between sessions, preparing the speakers, and reflecting on previous sessions to inform the next. This stage was led by Camden Council working with Involve and The Democratic Society.

“From a project point of view, it was one of the best-run events I’ve been part of in my local government career.” F1

The Learning section of this report focuses on the factors influencing effective delivery of this stage. This included timing, and the valuing of different perspectives and knowledge – and how these are brought together.

Translation and Feedback

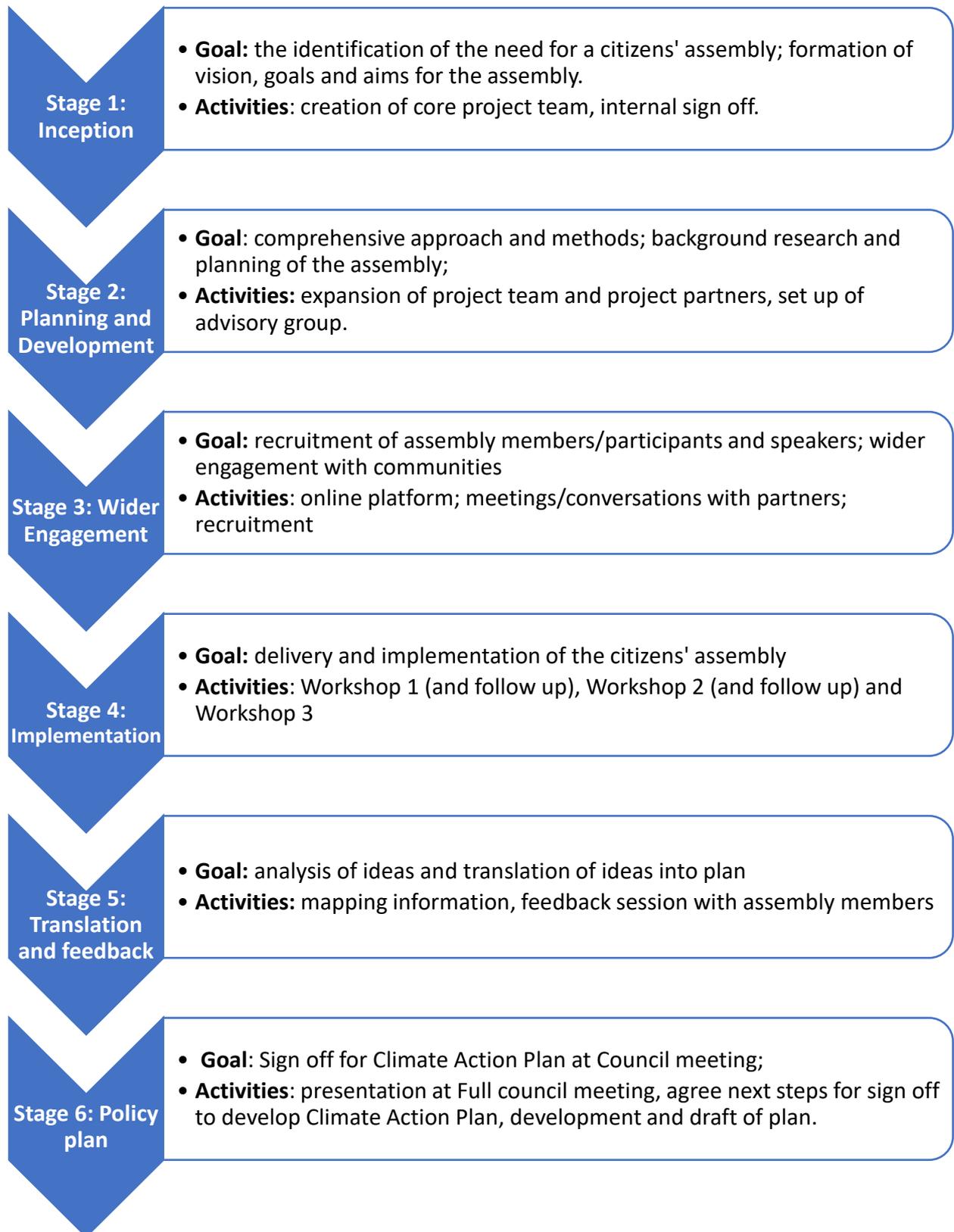
This stage, and the following, are still ongoing, as it involves gathering and analysing the knowledge and understanding gained via the citizens' assembly to develop actionable policies and plans. So far, this has been an iterative process, with multi-layered loops relating to the translation of ideas. The ideas from the citizens' assembly have been mapped and reformulated, presented back to members of the assembly, then developed further – work which has continued beyond the scope of this evaluation.

Crucial to the effective delivery of this stage is maintaining engagement with assembly members and other stakeholders. 37 out of the 49 participants who attended all the assembly meetings indicated that they wanted to remain involved.

Policy Plan

This is the final stage we have identified, and is yet to take place fully. Camden Council have officially declared a climate emergency, but a longer term intention within this stage is the sign-off of the 2020 Climate Action Plan. At the time of writing this report, the plan is still in development, although some of the recommendations have already been put into action or existing related activities promoted. This includes the creation of a six-week climate-focused Think & Do pop-up, and the sharing of information about a solar feasibility study and the opportunities offered by the Camden Climate Fund.

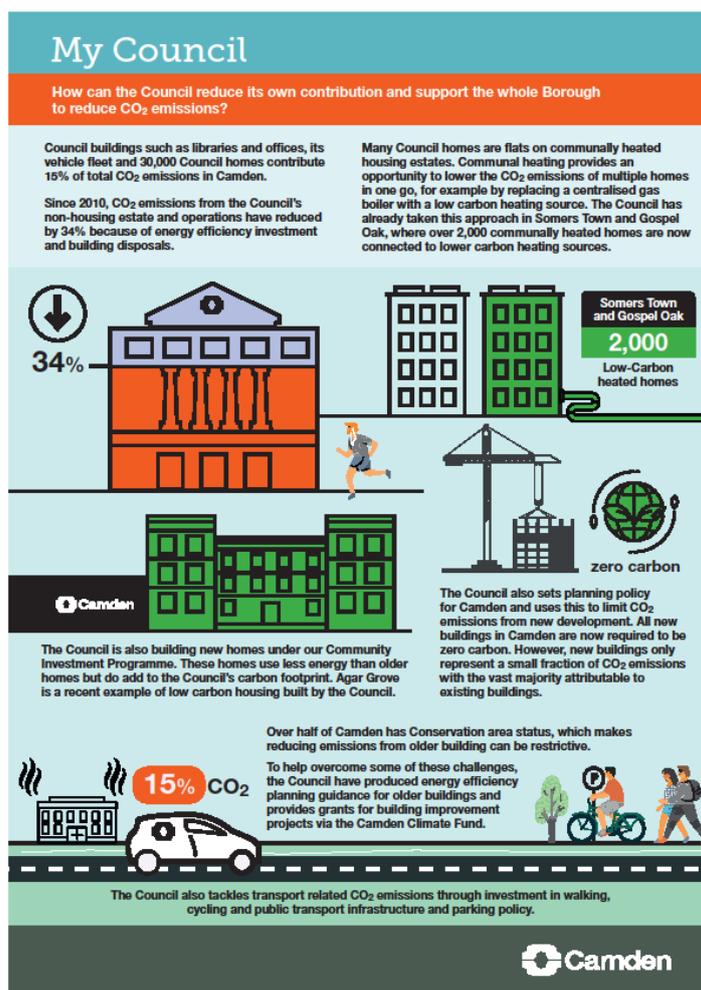
Figure 2: Model of Camden Council’s Citizens’ Assembly on the Climate Crisis



Outputs

The outputs from all these activities are summarised below:

- 3 assembly meetings, over 12 hours;
- 2 partner organisations involved in shaping the project;
- 157 residents initially recruited;
- 55 assembly members attended the first meeting;
- 49 assembly members attended all three meetings;
- 2,000 visits and 250 comments submitted to CommonPlace;
- 6 schools consulted via the Sustainers programme;
- 13 organisations represented at a Camden Climate Change Alliance roundtable;
- 613 total ideas generated;
- 213 ideas shortlisted;
- 17 final recommendations from assembly members.



Outcomes

Participating in Camden's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis was a positive experience for almost everyone involved. Participants (i.e. assembly members) on average rated the assembly as a whole as 5.2 out of 6 in their feedback forms.

"The energy and passion was wonderful, I loved being part of it and hope to participate in future." P10

"I was privileged to be in the room. It was a powerful moment." F6

A number of personal outcomes were repeatedly identified by participants both in feedback forms and interviews. Most common was the knowledge gained from the presentations and deliberation, with 'I have learned a lot during the Assembly about how Camden can respond to the Climate Crisis' rated very highly. Tied to this was an increase in confidence in their ability to engage with climate discussions.

"Great to learn from the experts" I2

"Improved understanding of both the topic and what our local authority is doing about it. More confidence to speak about it to those around me." I3

Although some already felt they were doing all they could to live sustainably, most of those interviewed talked about the behaviour changes they had made since participating in the assembly. This included taking action to within their day-to-day lives, as well as considerations around how they could get involved in climate action on a bigger scale.

"My home habits have changed since the Assembly. I make every effort to choose food that is packaged in recyclable containers (or not packaged at all). I take any non-recyclable packaging back to the supermarket I bought it from. My aim is just 2 household bins. One - food waste bin. Two - recycle bin." I1

"I've been in touch with two of the groups and hope to go along to some of them. I'm already moving towards living more eco-friendly, and considering a masters in environmental economics and policy - the citizens' assembly probably helped that along too." I4

There was no evidence of any shifts in attitudes or perceptions towards the climate crisis, although this was not an explicit intention of the assembly. Nevertheless, the process encouraged participants to think more widely about politics and their own engagement, both positively and negatively.

"I've joined the Green Party! Always voted but now thinking more politically." I2

"I think the inability of politicians, local or otherwise to really harness the community's energy in useful action has led to the rise of groups like Extinction Rebellion, frustrated at the slowness of action and unable to contribute in any other meaningful way." I3

Also frequently mentioned in the feedback forms and interviews was an increased sense of connection participants felt with their fellow residents; some intended to meet up again once the sessions had finished.

"Made contacts that I would be able to say hello and chat to if I saw them in the street" I2

"Simplicity of people coming together who might live one block apart but never meet – really powerful." I4

"Meeting Camden residents from all backgrounds." P12

This positivity extended to Camden itself, both the borough and the council, building a sense of local pride for some.

"I feel more passionate about Camden as a Council, its forward thinking. Proud to live here. Felt like it was a great way to contribute locally, and hope it starts a bigger trend with other local authorities." I2

"I made a difference and feel more engaged with the Council." P7

"Now knowing other Councils are doing it is inspiring." I5

Only one participant disagreed and two neither agreed nor disagreed that 'citizens' assemblies like this should be used more often to inform decision making', citing concerns about manipulation and lack of depth. However, those who did agree with the statement cited the balance and representativeness of resulting decisions, shaped by residents who will be affected by them.

"Involving citizens informs us, empowers us, makes us feel heard and that we have a stake in our society, and could generate new ideas, or a political mandate to support institutional action." P40

"It provides broader viewpoints and the chance for views from people who don't usually have the chance to express them." P46

This is a clear signal to Camden Council that their plan to 'open up the council so all citizens can have a say' and ensure policy-making is increasingly a 'shared endeavour involving local people'² is a popular one, as well as testament to their commitment in practice.

Additionally, those who facilitated or supported the citizens' assembly also referenced similar personal outcomes, including a stronger belief in the power of citizens' assemblies or deliberative processes, and a strengthened sense of the value of their work.

"It made me really support Camden's participation agenda and I saw the importance of accessibility and diversity of recruitment. Proud that Camden prioritises it." F4

"I learnt the importance of listening to people." S2

"I came away feeling really, really proud that Camden stuck out its neck and did this - albeit imperfectly!" F8

Closing the full Council meeting, the completion of the assembly process, Cllr Harrison stated that it had been "one of the most valuable debates I've ever been part of in this chamber".

² Camden Council, 'Our Camden Plan' (2018), p.8

Learning

This section explores what worked well and what could be improved about the planning and implementation of Camden's Citizens' Assembly on the climate crisis, based on the evaluation data collected. Each section relates to an aspect of the evaluation framework, and is accompanied by suggestions for future engagement and participation activities.

Institutional capacity

What worked well?

- Strong leadership and advocacy for the citizens' assembly from senior stakeholders to instigate the project.
- Cross departmental working within Camden enabled a range of staff to 'buy-in' to the project.
- Involvement of Camden staff in the process (e.g. as facilitators) built capacity and had a positive impact on their motivation in relation to their own jobs.
- Responding to and maintaining an open dialogue with criticism and negative feedback built constructive relationships and changed some external attitudes to the assembly.

What didn't work so well?

- Involvement of Camden staff in the process initially raised questions over the impartiality and independence of the citizens' assembly.
- The Advisory Group was relatively small and somewhat limited in its engagement.

Suggestions for future participation and engagement activities

- Be open and transparent about the role of the council within any participatory process, including how and why the format, purpose and 'rules' of engagement have been determined.

Camden's decision to hold a Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis was motivated by both internal and external drivers, as discussed in the previous section, encompassing responsiveness to wider momentum and progress their own priorities. Internally, the council's 10 year environmental sustainability plan was coming to an end, and they were keen to continue to develop their approach to running citizens' assemblies, so the decision was made to bring the two together.

Camden council have a strong commitment to resident engagement and participation, including through citizens' assemblies, which has been driven by the current Leader, Cllr Georgia Gould.

"We want everyone in Camden to ultimately be part of a citizens' assembly." C1

"There's a real drive at the moment for participation in democracy, and this is linked to developing trust between citizens and political processes." CT1

The majority of stakeholders interviewed thought Camden's decision to hold the UK's first citizens' assembly on the climate crisis was ambitious. Even those who disagreed only did so because they expected such ambition from Camden.

“Camden is innovative and ambitious. It doesn’t surprise me that it held the first citizens’ assembly on the climate because the leader is rebellious, open to doing things differently and to being critiqued.” F7

A key feature of citizens’ assemblies are their independence; they are not run by those ultimately responsible for responding to any decisions which result, and are overseen by an independent advisory board. Camden hired Involve to lead and design the overall process, with support from The Democratic Society, but they also played a significant – arguably greater – role themselves, from generating content to providing most of the facilitators. The decision to do this both benefited the process and created challenges in relation to its reception and delivery.

The costs of running a citizens’ assembly are high, and part of Camden’s motivation was resource-saving. For example, they used their in-house community researchers to recruit participants, rather than the recommended sortition (stratified random sampling). Another motivation was the expertise held within the council.

“We’d done loads of research on climate change in Camden – that’s the most difficult thing about these type of assemblies. Every single one is completely different, e.g. in rural Yorkshire everyone would be talking about transport, no-one about businesses. So you have to have people living it day to day to deliver the content.” CT2

Similarly, given their commitment to the citizens’ assembly model, building internal capacity around delivering them was a priority. It also provided the opportunity for cross-council working, bringing together different Council departments. This approach appears to have paid off, with interviewees indicating that the internal project management was amongst the best they had seen. A number of Camden staff who facilitated the sessions also highlighted the positive impact it had on their motivation in relation to their own jobs, and their belief in citizens’ assemblies as a democratic tool.

“It makes you more committed....gives a little more meaning to the job.” F5

“I was absolutely amazed. I was quite sceptical before but citizens’ assemblies work!” F6

On the other hand, Camden’s decision to take on such a significant organisation and management role did impact their relationship with Involve, the external facilitator.

“Involve were a bit reticent about us doing most of the work – not for ethical reasons.... But was a useful and collaborative process.” CT4

Whilst some praised Involve for the challenge and facilitation they provided, others within Camden were not as satisfied with the extent and quality of their contribution in comparison to internal staff. However, it is unclear how much this relates to partnership working in general, the citizens’ assembly process in particular, or some of the wider issues such as timing, discussed below.

“With the planning of the sessions there were a lot of iterations.... My colleague was really good at spotting where things were missing [from Involve’s plans]. For instance, originally there wasn’t any time booked in for maturing ideas or idea development, which was when ideas were shared amongst the tables and worked up. This just wasn’t included so we had to ask them to put it in”. CT1

On the whole, this did not translate to the participant experience, many of whom praised the overall management and running of the assembly in their feedback.

Either way, the central role Camden played in the process did lead to very public questions around its impartiality and independence. XR published an open letter in the Camden New Journal after the assembly had been announced, asking questions around the recruitment process, commitment (or lack of) to act on the findings, and most seriously, its independence and impartiality.

“Some will find it hard to avoid the conclusion that the council has designed the assembly to deflect responsibility onto residents and to relieve themselves of the need to take real action.”³

Some of the assembly participants felt the same, with two people walking out in the first session.

“I know that some of the citizens were still sceptical about us, Camden, leading the citizens’ assembly. Some of those who left during the process thought that we were pulling the wool over their eyes – and that we would still do what we wanted. I spoke to the leavers, and one felt this way for sure.” CT1

The council did set up an independent advisory group to oversee the process, advise on speaker and topic selection and act as a critical friend. However, the group only had three members, which is considerably smaller than the average, and only one member was able to attend any of the assembly sessions. As such, at least one of the other members themselves had concerns about how effective their role could be.

“I did feel slightly concerned about the advisory group sitting within Camden Council. We were invited to attend the assembly sessions but I was unable to, so had to rely on their reports of how the sessions went.” SG1

Nevertheless, by the end of the process, most sceptics had been persuaded of the assembly’s value. Cllr Gould and senior Camden staff maintained an open dialogue with XR, inviting representatives to observe the final assembly session, speak at the full council meeting, and play a role in implementing the actions. Likewise, one of the participants who left was persuaded by Camden staff to return. She had been part of similar consultation exercises before which she had felt were tokenistic and predetermined, but by the end, had clearly been convinced that Camden’s intent was genuine.

“The transition from Day One to now.... My feelings are very different. I’m excited – I am really happy that they actually did this.”⁴

The assembly also generated considerable media attention, including multiple articles in *The Guardian*, and Camden’s expertise is in high demand from other local authorities who are considering running similar citizens’ assembly processes. The citizens’ assembly on the climate crisis therefore not only fits into wider agendas for citizens’ assemblies and resident-led policymaking within Camden Council, but within the sector and beyond.

³ Brook, Tom (XR Camden), ‘The climate and ecological crisis means real change must start now’, *Camden New Journal*, 11 July 2019, <http://islingtontribune.com/article/the-climate-and-ecological-crisis-means-real-change-must-start-now>. Accessed 16/08/2019

⁴ Camden Council, ‘Camden Council tackles the Climate Crisis’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzzWc5wMQ6s>. Accessed 11/10/2019

Content

What worked well?

- The content mapped onto the three clear steps of a citizens' assembly: learning, deliberation and decision-making.
- Assembly members left inspired and informed.

What didn't work so well?

- The technical complexity and sheer breadth of information encompassed by the 'climate crisis' created barriers for some participants' engagement.
- Lack of contextual or supporting information made it difficult for assembly members and facilitators to assess ideas accurately.
- Lack of guidance on how participants should prioritise ideas (e.g. cost effectiveness, feasibility, etc.) led to a tendency to favour the least technical or more clearly articulated ideas.
- Lack of information provided on Camden's existing policies and practices, in relation to the climate crisis and the solutions discussed, led to a number of 'new' ideas which are already part of Camden's work.
- The categorisation and grouping of ideas (i.e. home, neighbourhood and council) – led to ideas being repeated, exposed gaps (i.e. businesses), and did not map onto Camden's workstreams.

Suggestions for future participation and engagement activities

- Provide enough information for effective participation, recognising that participants will come from a range of starting points.
- Provide background information on the council's existing activity, resource and scope.
- Provide guidance to support participant contributions, e.g. a shared language and format to propose ideas.
- Establish shared principles to inform decision-making, perhaps via a value-setting activity.

The three steps involved in citizens' assemblies – learning, deliberation and decision-making – mean they are particularly suited for complex and contested issues. There are perhaps none more so than the climate crisis.

"Our first citizens' assembly was great, but it wasn't a contested space. We wanted a more knotty issue like this – emotive, politically challenging – to test it out on." CT4

However, the technical complexity and sheer breadth of topics which make up 'the climate crisis' proved to be problematic in terms of participant engagement and for the results of the process. 'I had enough information to participate effectively' received one the lowest number of positive responses in the participant feedback forms, and was something also observed by the facilitators.

"This was a huge, many faceted topic and even with this amount of time I felt we needed more depth and awareness of possibilities" P47

The majority of people did understand but there was lots of intimidating information presented all at once... I have a geography degree and felt overwhelmed." F4

Participants were not provided with copies of the presentations (although they were posted online afterwards) or any other written materials, so the first session was almost entirely listening to

speakers present. One facilitator also reflected that not enough consideration had initially been given to how the interpreters would cope with how challenging and complex some of the information was in English, let alone when trying to simultaneously translate.

The combination of complexity and volume became most obvious on day 3 of the assembly. Between them, participants had to rate over 200 ideas generated through Camden's wider engagement. However, the ideas were provided with no context or supporting information (e.g. to explain acronyms) and were therefore difficult for the groups and facilitators to accurately assess.

"Some of the suggestions were hard to clarify, especially the ones that I came to "fresh". Asked the experts but they couldn't clarify some of them." F11

"At some points during the final day I thought it wasn't working well. Someone vented their frustration to me that it was all too complex and said experts like me should decide." S4

This, and the following activity in which participants prioritised those ideas which had been rated highest, were the weakest point in the whole process. Members of Camden's Sustainability team and others with expertise expressed surprise that some ideas appeared to get 'lost' in the deliberation. These included solutions such as retrofit, a method to reduce carbon emissions from existing buildings. While this is commonplace practice for sustainability professionals, it is not something the vast majority of ordinary citizens are likely to know about or understand in detail.

"Some key areas which are technically needed to reduce emissions aren't particularly tackled [in the final actions].... I wonder if the assembly felt unable to address specific issues that were maybe too technical." CT2

"There was lots of ideas and many which were similar, confusion over voting practicalities, facilitators and participants trying to group the ideas without enough knowledge to do so, so a couple of strong ideas got lost in translation and so filtered out." F6

During the ratings activity, participants themselves noted that they were rating 'easy wins' and the clearest ideas higher than those which were more complicated and confusing. In the next activity, there was a lack of guidance on the criteria participants should use to prioritise the ideas (e.g. cost effectiveness, feasibility, etc.). Even if this had been present, participants could not have been expected to know how this applied to each idea, given the lack of any additional information beyond the idea itself.

"I would question whether the same priorities would have been chosen, especially if they understood the actual resources available." LF1

"The voting bit was very overwhelming, it seemed to have gone from being inspired by learning to go back to instinct, not practical or evidence based. Didn't work in the big level group either, hard to read people's handwriting, especially when longer ideas as well." F4

"There was a problem with the prioritisation exercise, it was based on dots ... people just went for gut feelings...The participants should have been given guidance on how to process the information and make judgements between the ideas." F11

It would have been virtually impossible to have provided lots of additional information during the limited assembly time. But, along with some contextual information, the lack of a shared basis for prioritisation could have been addressed with a value-setting activity, establishing a set of shared principles to inform decision-making. This could also have been used as guidance for Camden and its citizens in the creation of the final climate action plan and subsequent activity.

“Still lacking facts for making decisions: everyone wants to ban what they don't do. Need a robust plan that's workable.” P13

Although the overall question asked to the citizens' assembly was broad – *‘How can the Council and the people of Camden help limit the impact of climate change while protecting and enhancing our natural environment?’* - it was underpinned by a supplementary question - *“What do we need to do in our homes, neighbourhoods and council?”* - acknowledging the roles of other stakeholders beyond the council themselves. These three levels of action were used to frame the assembly's activities with the intention of producing 6 final ideas at each level.

“The levels are not too technical, and obviously interrelated, and helps with the idea of shared responsibility and understanding.” CT2

Some participants and facilitators thought the levels worked well, but their role in the process did expose a number of inherent tensions. First of all, returning to the gaps in knowledge discussed above, there was no information provided on the considerable sustainability activity Camden council already have in place; many of the final recommendations from the assembly are to a large extent already part of Camden's existing work. There was no presentation from council staff to put the assembly and its recommendations in context; in fact, there was some confusion in the about exactly who the speakers were representing.

“It felt like people were holding the presenters to account for Camden's action or inaction in the first two sessions, even though they were nothing to do with Camden.” I4

“Didn't learn about what Camden IS ALREADY DOING.” P36

Secondly, the fact that it was a council-run process focused attention on this level of responsibility above the others.

“Camden were enthusiastic about the three levels, but it was hard to get my head around why the focus therefore was on a Council plan output – it made it automatically about the Council!” F10

This played out in the discussions and the final ideas, many of which involved some council responsibility even at home and neighbourhood level. Similarly, the final recommendations include an action at each level which essentially relate to the same thing:

- 3. Create more green space on residential streets (home)
- 6. Plant more trees and create more allotments (neighbourhood)
- 17. Plant trees and retain public spaces (council)

The use of thematic categories – e.g. ‘green space’, ‘buildings’ – would have overcome this repetition and allowed space for genuinely different ideas across categories. Documents from Camden indicate that the streamlining of ideas from over 600 to over 200 was done so thematically, and then coded into home/neighbourhood/council. Again, with an issue as vast as climate change, there are endless possibilities to shape the presentation of content. Camden's Sustainability team acknowledged they had considered other options but chose the nested levels as they seemed to be the best fit in terms of the output they were hoping to generate. Yet at the follow-up meeting prior to the presentation to full council, the Sustainability team presented seven workstreams which returned the ideas to a thematic framing, presumably having created more work for themselves in the process and removing the context in which those ideas had been selected by the assembly.

The final tension created by the home/neighbourhood/council levels related to who is missing in this framing. These groups are limited in their ability to create systemic change alone; businesses and larger government bodies are fundamental to enabling or blocking actions to reduce emissions.

"I am concerned about the macroeconomic gap – it is bigger than the local authority level, so where does this go?...Obviously there are lots of local benefits in community action, but there are lots of local issues which are also not in Camden's remit." LF1

"Intentions are good, the Assembly's good, the speakers are fabulous, but without an Act of Parliament not enough will happen quickly." P11

Camden council did originally include 'country' as one of the levels in the online consultation, but Involve recommended that this was not included in the assembly itself, as it was too big to deliberate on. Whilst a valid decision, this was not fully surfaced during the assembly so some participants were left feeling frustrated.

"We also need support and commitment from Central Government and to work with other Councils, national bodies, different levels of government - here in the UK and globally." P45

Similarly, the local business community had been engaged prior to the assembly through a Camden Climate Alliance roundtable. However, one fact which clearly stuck with participants, repeated frequently throughout the process, was the significant role businesses play in generating emissions; their lack of visibility was therefore striking.

"At the beginning of the session the presentations said that around 70% of emissions come from business - maybe they should have been involved." I7

"Not so positive was the non-representation at every meeting of ... any businesses leaders/managers/middle management, etc. They are all citizens of Camden ... and have a large impact on it." I1

Despite these issues, participants did finish the process feeling much more informed and enthusiastic about the potential to make a difference in their own lives and communities. They also made it clear to Camden that the council needs to 'Improve council communications and engagement on climate change' (action 14).

"[The best bit was] the great information about what we can do in our communities, knowing what budget is out there, knowing the different views, ideas and background of who is in the community." P26

"Our biggest success opportunity (and amount of interest) is the communications and engagement. The rest is business as usual...people don't know half the stuff we do at the moment, that's the biggest thing we found from those actions." CT2

Participants also voted overwhelmingly in favour of the final action, with only one idea receiving below 80% agreement. Specifics notwithstanding, there was also broad agreement from interviewees that the overall question itself had been answered, at least in principle, in the sense that the council now has a greater understanding of resident priorities and a mandate to action.

Structure and timing

What worked well?

- Limited drop out from participants over the three sessions.
- Creation of a positive atmosphere within the sessions, particularly as the assembly drew to a close.
- From the participants' perspective, the facilitation of the assembly process was very positive.

What didn't work so well?

- Limited amount of time for the whole citizens' assembly was generally a barrier in the delivery of the planned activities and for properly engaging with such a complex topic.
- Within the final session there was a constant sense of time pressure (combined with the lack of context and guidance provided for the prioritisation activities, as discussed earlier), which compromised the effectiveness and potentially the outcomes of the assembly as a result.

Suggestions for future participation and engagement activities

- A longer period of planning and implementation would allow for a more considered process and sophisticated session design.
- Clearer guidance for facilitators – including time to talk through technical information and possible discussions.

Crucial to the citizens' assembly model is the time it provides for participants to take on, discuss and reach conclusions on information provided. There is no official standard for how long a citizens' assembly process should last for, but the majority are at least two weekends, often more. Camden's citizens' assembly on the climate crisis took place in 12 hours, over two evenings and one full day, spread over three weeks. The council were concerned that asking any more of people would risk drop-off, but only six assembly members failed to attend all three sessions, which suggests this may not be the case (although other factors must be taken into consideration, including the voucher payment). A small number of participants felt the assembly was too long, but overall it was clear that the amount of time was generally a barrier in the delivery of the planned activities and for properly engaging with such a complex topic.

"There wasn't enough time, that is the thing, every meeting we had we are short of time... The ideas would have been elaborated more, and we would have had more precise information. Like today we didn't get through all the slides and we rushed through everything." 15

Part of the reason for this was how quickly Camden moved from deciding to run a citizens' assembly, to actually delivering it – barely three months. Whilst this was an impressive turnaround and indicative of their intention to respond to the external environment, a longer period of planning and implementation could have allowed for a more considered process and sophisticated session design.

"On such a complex topic this felt really rushed. During the sessions the conversations were really rushed didn't really feel that they could contribute. The time allowed for the process really makes it or break it." F11

"I think it was ridiculous the short amount of time that members of the citizens' assembly had to learn about all the issues... to gain any real perspective, or be able to generate any ideas for meaningful solutions." S1

This was especially the case with the final day's activities, which included assessing the feasibility and prioritising 20 ideas per group, voting on and starting to develop associated actions plans. Participants and facilitators suggested that a constant sense of time pressure (combined with the lack of context and guidance provided for the prioritisation activities, as discussed earlier) compromised the effectiveness and even the outcome of the assembly as a result.

"Really rushed. No time for me to take in facts... all the speakers were being rushed!" P18

"It needed more time – there was a rush to 'now this is it' at the end, under pressure, e.g. 3 dots, 20 ideas and 5 minutes – this, this this, no time to think." F5

A flaw with the structure of the third session was highlighted when a representative from each of the nine groups presented the ideas they'd been developing into an action plan, to be voted on by all assembly members. One participant asked whether they should be voting on the idea or the action plan, and was told the idea, thus undermining the previous hour's work. Although the detail from the plans has subsequently been taken on board by the council to help them develop the actions into activity, but this was not made clear at the time. Nevertheless, this did not detract from the largely positive atmosphere as the assembly drew to a close.

"In the end I think the final presentations by the group representatives were excellent. People had come up with quite interesting detail about how to tackle the issues – and presented them in an uplifting way." S3

The frantic activity of the third session was in contrast to the first two sessions, which largely involved listening to speakers presenting at participants, with limited time for questions and interaction. It was very positive that unanswered questions were collected and the answers circulated afterwards, but facilitators reported that participants found it difficult to maintain concentration during the session itself, especially as there were no resources on the table to help them take in the information and only limited materials for their own note-taking. Learning is an essential part of a citizens' assembly process but this could have felt less 'top down' and overwhelming if the presentations had been broken up by questioning or discussion opportunities and materials provided in advance.

"Session was good, but rushed. There's so much we need to know. Hard to ask all the questions we need to ask. I've got a lot of ideas, and I put some up on the board, but it would be good to have more time, to take it all in and clarify what's been said. It would be great to know more in order to be confident about our decisions." P26

From the participants' perspective, the facilitation of the assembly process was very positive, other than difficulties experienced in relation to the limited time; they rated the lead and table facilitators were rated on average 5.3 and 5.2 out of 6 respectively.

"The table facilitators were great at being fair to other people's opinions." P5

"It was excellent. Surpassed my expectations." P40

Time and complexity was, yet again, the biggest issue for the facilitators themselves, especially those who were not as experienced or knowledgeable about the topic. Involve provided training, which was seen as useful, but rushed briefings before each session proved stressful. This was especially the case

before the final meeting, when the lead facilitator did not have enough time to answer questions, undoubtedly contributing to some of the confusion which followed.

“I would have liked more opportunity to read the technical information and try and understand myself, to help guide conversations better and ease facilitation.” F8

Using council facilitators did have its benefits, as discussed earlier, but there were some instances where their involvement became potentially damaging to the overall process. For example, some tables were facilitated by members of the sustainability team, so had access to more contextual information and the opportunity to discuss the content more thoroughly. Others found themselves being challenged by participants about the council’s existing activity, or unsure when to contribute information to the discussion or step back. Clearer guidance – and more time to talk through such scenarios – would have been valuable.

“The final exercise (Day 3 after lunch) needed more time and structure to enable facilitators to help us get results. This was the only moment of serious frustration, where I felt poor facilitation prevented citizens' expressing our voice and intent and shaping ideas clearly and effectively. It felt defensive and our ideas were being procedurally diffused. Not good.” P40

It was, however, very helpful to have the community researchers present at the assembly meetings. They did not act as table facilitators, but oversaw the logistical organisation and acted as a point of check-in both for the participants, and for the other council staff. They were able to contribute useful insights between sessions which involve and Camden staff did take on board to make improvements, where possible.



Managing expectations

What worked well?

- Camden Council now have a clearer understanding of the areas of climate policy which residents feel strongly about
- The council acted on feedback about the first session feeling passive and introduced the 'Green Space' for ideas in the second session.

What didn't work so well?

- The deliberative purpose of a citizens' assembly was not fully explained to participants.
- The disjointed nature between idea generation and prioritisation, contributed to confusion around assembly members' role as distinct from those who had been part of the wider engagement.
- Clarity on the overall aims of the citizens' assembly.

Suggestions for future participation and engagement activities

- Do not start planning engagement exercises by deciding on the method, but by clarifying intentions and rationale for engagement, then selecting an appropriate approach.
- Clearly explain the purposes and scope of engagement i.e. developing ideas, or deliberation and decision making, to all those involved.

Within the wider participation and engagement sector, doubts are beginning to creep in about the current proliferation of citizens' assemblies, specifically around the concern that they are being chosen without due consideration, and compromised in their delivery.⁵ Citizens' assemblies are intended to bring together a representative and diverse group together to deliberate on behalf of their fellow citizens, often preceded by wider engagement activities which might take the form of consultation on the ideas the assembly should discuss. Camden Council were commendably determined to engage as many residents as possible, so encouraged them to contribute ideas for deliberation during the assembly process through the online platform Commonplace, as well as meetings with local schoolchildren and businesses.

However, assembly members were recruited with the understanding that they would also be submitting their own ideas through the assembly – 'the assembly is about giving ordinary people the opportunity to have their say' – and the community researchers themselves thought this was going to be the case.⁶ In practice, this was not as clear cut, causing confusion and disquiet amongst a number of participants, and challenges for the process as a whole.

"Citizens' role wasn't clear to them or others. It was confusing - were they initiators, prioritising, or choosing between options? Mix of the two meant it didn't quite work. Could have been clarified and communicated better." F9

⁵Hughes, Tim, 'When is a citizens' assembly not a citizens' assembly? Towards some standards', Involve, 20/11/2019 <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/news/when-citizens-assembly-not-citizens-assembly-towards-some-standards>. Accessed 26/11/2019

⁶ Camden Council, Camden's Citizens Assembly 2019: Survey for new participants', 2019

At no point during the process – not even in the introduction – was the deliberative purpose of a citizens’ assembly fully explained. During the first session, participants had been subdued during the presentations and became visibly more animated during the Q&A, which turned into discontent for some when this interaction was then rigidly controlled. As part of their debrief, facilitators fed back about the passive, top-down nature of the session, which led to the introduction of a ‘green space’ in the second session, where members could contribute their own ideas; some did, but this was never the specific focus of an activity during the assembly so felt somewhat side-lined. As a result, tensions rose on some tables during the final day, as participants began to feel frustrated that their voices weren’t being heard in the way they had expected, creating challenges for facilitators.

“The use of ‘Commonplace’ questions... diluted the impact of the initial talks by speakers. We could have produced our own ideas. The idea of the Citizens Assembly was a nonsense when these were used because we do not know whether they came from a cross section of society? They were not present at the ‘expert’ speaker talks. P42

“A deflating, disappointing feel at the final afternoon that our ideas and intent were being clipped, limited, hosed, watered down. On the final afternoon the Council felt defensive and in our group a bit heavy handed and obfuscating.” P40

Idea generation and prioritisation are generally treated separately within participatory processes. Evidence from design experts suggests this is more effective as it removes the sense of emotional investment participants may feel in relation to ideas that they have contributed, and therefore how they respond to those being rejected or changed by the wider group. Camden’s facilitators noted a lack of engagement during the final session when participants were expected to work on ideas they didn’t necessarily ‘buy in’ to. One group decided to reject one of the two final ideas they were supposed to develop into an action plan, despite the idea being voted through different rounds of prioritisation by other assembly members, resulting in 17 rather than 18 final actions.

“My group didn’t produce a final action. They felt it had been very complex, it was someone else’s idea and didn’t want it, or believe in it, so an action plan felt pointless. But the idea did come from a previous group so... I was pleased with the honesty though!” F2

“Another person left the room in anger – their group had fallen out over whether they should develop a proposal at all – they didn’t like the idea that another group had chosen to be developed.” S3

Camden staff themselves acknowledged this lack of clarity and participants’ subsequent feeling of being “railroaded” (CT2). This raises the question of whether a citizens’ assembly was in fact the correct mechanism to lead Camden’s resident engagement around the climate crisis. There are a number of possible responses to this, but they all depend on the exact aims of the engagement exercise. Interviews with the individuals leading the activity within Camden suggests that these were not necessarily uniform. There were two distinct categories of aims mentioned:

1. Relating to Camden’s response to the climate crisis
2. Supporting participation in local policy making

Within these, however, a range of different intentions were mentioned. For the first, this included developing a policy agenda and a greater understanding of the areas of disagreement and interest from residents, as well as increasing awareness about the crisis itself and individual responsibility to respond. For the second, aims ranged from building relationships and bringing people together, to

being more ambitious in opening up decision making, giving citizens' a voice in the decision making process and continue learning about the citizens' assembly model.

Whilst a citizens' assembly model is suited to achieving some of these aims – namely understanding residents' views, producing recommendations for policy, and involvement in decision making – it is not necessarily the best choice as an engagement and education exercise, and is certainly not the only participation method which gives citizens' a voice and brings people together. For example, co-design exercises, citizens' juries or panels, or participatory budgeting, alongside wider consultation, would have allowed for similar outcomes and removed some of the confusion. Alternatively, if Camden are committed to the citizens' assembly model, then they may wish to consider accompanying it with more comprehensive wider engagement relating to education and ideas generation (virtual and/or physical), then focusing the assembly process on evaluating those suggestions in relation to criteria such as feasibility, impact and Camden's existing activity. This has the potential to overcome the dissatisfaction felt by participants, as well as the struggles within the session themselves assess ideas with little contextual understanding.

This is not to say that Camden's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis was not a valuable or meaningful process, but that the council could benefit from spending more time clarifying aims and establishing the most appropriate method for future participation and engagement activities.



What worked well?

- Supporting access to the assembly through transport assistance, crèche, interpreters for those who needed them, and reimbursement via vouchers.
- The diversity of assembly members compared to previous similar exercises
- The role played by community researchers in recruitment and continued participant support throughout the assembly process.
- The strong positive engagement of participants, especially during the final session.

What didn't work so well?

- Not enough attention given to the imbalance of knowledge, confidence and therefore power in the room.
- The lack of diversity in the speakers chosen to present.
- Limited engagement of Camden residents who were not part of the assembly.
- Holding the assembly during the summer holidays negatively affected recruitment.

Suggestions for future participation and engagement activities

- Where possible, consider timing in relation to how it will enable participation, rather than council timelines.
- Consider how speakers are selected and prepared.
- Provide resources and ensure sufficient time is built in to supporting assembly participants to contribute on a more equal footing.
- Extend the wider consultation activities to reach more residents.

One of the key elements of a citizens' assembly is that participants form a representative sample of the relevant population, i.e. of Camden residents. This is usually achieved through sortition (stratified random sampling), using census data. Despite not using the statistical methodology, Camden were still able to recruit a broadly representative sample of assembly members (see Involve report for full details⁷), using their community researchers to over-recruit and then selecting the final participants based on demographic data. Those aged 45 and over were over-represented, but this is a common issue in public participation.

The community researchers recruited via public spaces or door-knocking, split over Camden's wards, completing face-to-face questionnaires. Their experience and insight of the local community means that they are able to overcome traditional barriers to participation experienced by certain groups; those from white backgrounds were actually underrepresented.

"We've done letter sending before but you don't get as good representation especially of lower SEO – end up with the same people, changes the room. Experts in council engagement – people you see all the time, despite sending 3000 letters! Also if we'd have used the electoral roll... we had

⁷ Involve, 'Camden's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis: recommendations for tackling the climate crisis in Camden', September 2019

<https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/Camden%20Citizens%27%20Assembly%20on%20the%20Climate%20Crisis%20-%20Report.pdf>

students and refugees in the room, don't get that. Not the traditional way, but we stand by it."
CT4

"Drop out is very common once people have signed up (practicalities, realise they have other commitments, etc.) and this is often BAME working class, so they end up being underrepresented unless we over-recruit. But we have a lot of BAME researchers and this helps – easier to approach people." CR2

The community researchers reported significant interest around the idea of participating in the assembly about the climate crisis, more so than for previous exercises. However, the decision by the council to run the sessions in July, in order to suit the full Council meeting timeline, proved problematic; the drop-out rate was also the highest the researchers had experienced, despite the enthusiasm. Prioritising the council timetable over the access needs of the participants – the final session was once the summer holidays had begun – created more work and meant that the assembly was somewhat smaller than hoped.

Nevertheless, attendance at the assemblies remained high, with a low drop-out rate (six participants failed to attend all three sessions), despite the evening and weekend commitment it entailed.

"I was impressed.... people really care about the topic so made an effort and felt it was worthwhile." CR2

The council themselves put in a great deal of effort to ensure the assemblies were accessible to participants, including providing a crèche, transport assistance, and interpreters. The community researchers rang participants in between each session to collect feedback and ask what else they could do to support attendance. Refreshments were provided at each session, and participants received £150 in vouchers for completing all three sessions. Interviewees believed that this was not enough of an incentive alone to participate, based on previous experiences, so this success represented real interest and commitment. Although there were some areas of learning – such as providing more food in the evenings, avoiding noisy or overheated venues, and enabling reuse or recycling of catering materials – this side of the organisation was generally very effective.

The diversity of assembly members was a highlight mentioned again and again by all interviewees, organisers, facilitators and participants alike; a real marker of success internally was that one of the longest standing members of staff, a veteran of community engagement activities, did not recognise anyone in the room. The value of citizen's assemblies come from bringing people from different backgrounds together around issues which affect them all, enabling greater consideration of how the impacts may be experienced differently by different groups. Camden's assembly was itself partly prompted by an earlier climate debate which had been organised by a group of residents.

"It was full of very engaged people but very un-demographically representative....You can tell which ideas came from them on Commonplace – technical, deep green lifestyle choices. We didn't want to ignore the more mainstream, general opinions." CT2

"You can't have people deciding that those in social housing should pay more without those people in the room. Got to understand the complexity of the trade-offs." CT4

"Diversity is the key that provides different kinds of ideas" P9

Despite this positivity, one area of disappointment related to the lack of diversity in the speakers; white, and apparently from middle class backgrounds, they did not represent the diversity of borough. During the sessions, participants made comments about the 'unrealistic' nature of some of the

lifestyle choices suggested by the speakers and the assumptions apparently being made about the audience. Potentially more damaging was the “dismissive” (F5) tone of one of the speakers, who also failed to explain a number of technical terms. More considered speaker selection and preparation could have gone some way to mitigating this.

“One of the speakers was very full of himself.” P5

“One lady was fully participating in the first session but said ‘it’s not really for me’ when I rang her about the second. She said the presenters were not diverse and didn’t reflect the audience (i.e. white, male, no BAME at all). It would have been nice to have someone, they do exist. The facilitators also weren’t diverse – this puts people off, they want to see someone they have an affinity to, who reflects their background.” CR1

Additionally, some questions do remain around who wasn’t in the room, and the openness of the process externally. As mentioned earlier, there was no explicit representation from local businesses, who play a fundamental role in both contributing to and reducing the impact of the climate crisis, and will also be affected by any subsequent policy decisions. Similarly, transparency is a fundamental tenet of citizens’ assemblies and although Camden published materials and videos of the speakers online soon after the sessions, they did not livestream the assembly meetings. The online engagement process was also limited in its scope; again, with a longer time period, more resource could have gone into promoting the chance to contribute online, or to develop engagement tools which could have been taken to community centres, libraries or other public spaces. It was also impossible to identify where ideas had come from in the final session, which potentially added to the sense of confusion.

“I would have liked content to be available to all, including those who weren’t there. [On being told about the webpage] well, better communicated, as I wasn’t aware of it. Properly democratic would be to have some insight into the discussions as well, even if anonymised or only snippets, especially for those who were recruited but then couldn’t come. People knowing what and how it happened prevents the cynicism of ‘someone’s mate, stich up’. The online process also didn’t feel properly integrated or participatory in the same way.” CR2

Facilitating genuinely equal participation within any form of deliberative engagement is complex, balancing the voices of the more confident with those who are less comfortable speaking up, but this is perhaps especially so with a topic as complex as the climate. Participants came to the assembly with varied knowledge and understanding, and this played out in the group conversations, compounded by the short timeframe, volume of information, and the multifaceted nature of potential solutions. The statement ‘no-one at my table tended to dominate the discussion so that others found it difficult to contribute’ received the lowest positive score in the feedback forms.

“Those who struggled with the speed and keeping up in general, made them less confident in contributing their own ideas, especially in comparison to those who were already well aware of the issues, and so further ahead in that sense. Those contributors with the most knowledge and confidence were also the most challenging.” CR2

“Climate is a difficult one as it can get very technical, so there’s a disparity in how people engage... Some people were clearly well-read but saying stuff which hadn’t come from the experts and wasn’t fact checked – creates power imbalances on the table. The confidence to speak about what you ‘know’ makes them seem more like authorities, more listened to. Complicated dynamics of class, confidence, articulation, feeling entitled to participate, creates an imbalance with others who don’t speak up.” F9

Individual facilitators worked hard to try and engage all participants equally, and to some extent, it will always be a challenge to do this. On the other hand, given the constraints of timing and content, more thought could have been given to bringing participants to a similar level of understanding, and supporting different ways to contribute. This would also have helped those with accessibility needs, such as hearing difficulties or lack of fluency in English. Facilitators reported some participants getting annoyed with the whispering of the interpreters, and one participant was targeted by another for her perceived lack of participation.

“Really good facilitator at my table, but a resident who was new at my table - who was otherwise very positive - really embarrassed me and two others by pointing and saying why weren't we saying something. It really upset me, but I didn't have time to talk to the facilitator about this. Otherwise, it was a nice conversation on our table.” P26

The facilitation team acted quickly on identifying these issues, checking in with quieter participants about how they would like to be involved. Even so, more could have been done to support those who may not have so obviously been struggling. This could have included providing material in advance and between sessions, allowing contribution in writing and building in time for personal reflection rather than immediate small group discussions. Incorporating a values-based process, as discussed earlier, would also have enabled participants to contribute with reference to principles developed as a group, rather than rely on personal understanding.

This is not to say that these difficulties provided an insurmountable problem; on the contrary, all those involved were overwhelmingly positive about the ‘buzz’ in the room, including external facilitators who have been involved in numerous such events. Participants may have reported occasionally feeling dominated, but in the same form the highest positive response was received for ‘my fellow participants have respected what I had to say, even if they didn’t agree with me’.

“It was really heartening to see... residents taking charge more by the final session. The participant feeding back to wider group through interpreter, people speaking to the room, residents getting quite bossy in the final group.... There was more trust than I've seen at other such events.” F8

“It was one of the most engaged workshops I've been part of. People were really getting into it. There's always some reluctance, but you don't usually get such enthusiasm, willingness and interest” F10



What worked well?

- Camden's commitment to keep participants involved and be open about what happens next, to continue a sense of ownership and connection.
- Camden's acknowledgement of the importance of communication and engagement around the climate and their activity, and responding to this with creation of new posts with responsibility for community engagement and involvement.

What didn't work so well?

- Transparency around the translation of ideas into workstreams.
- Attendance at the follow-up session was low.
- Ideas from the assembly needed to be reformulated due to participants' lack of awareness of Camden's existing activities, and the lack of time to consider issues around feasibility and impact.

Suggestions for future participation and engagement activities

- Decide on next steps and how participants' involvement will be maintained before the assembly actually takes place, and communicate this clearly.
- Develop shared principles or criteria to guide how the council take ideas and recommendations forward.

It is not possible to provide a detailed or in-depth evaluation of how the results of the citizens' assembly have been translated into action, as this process is still very much ongoing. As such, the following reflects on the initial stages leading up to and including the full council meeting in October 2019.

Everyone involved in the citizens' assembly noted that the assembly itself was just the start, and the real test of 'success' would be how Camden develop and deliver on the recommendations from the assembly over the coming months and years. Given the limited resource and scope of the council, and the ambitious nature of some of the recommendations, doubts have been raised about their ability to fully deliver.

"Well I'm open minded but still wondering how Camden with its limited budget and powers will be able to deliver what was decided by the Assembly. I understand it wasn't binding for exactly that reason." S4

"That's people's big concern – will anything happen?" I2

"They've got a lot back and a huge amount of work to make good on it, I wonder how possible it is given the scale." F9

Camden staff have been forthright in their commitment to keep participants involved and be open about what happens next, and are very keen to ensure that they still feel a sense of ownership and connection. However, participants and others not directly involved in the organisation left the final assembly meeting feeling unsure about exactly how the ideas would be taken forward, beyond the

some kind of preparation for a presentation at the full council meeting and the eventual development of a new sustainability plan.

"I didn't get a clear understanding of when the ideas from the CA will be bought into practice. I'm not satisfied. I feel left up in the air." I1

"It felt like empowering people then sending them away with nothing. Not sure how much thought has gone into the 'what next'." SG1

"We won't be able to do all the ideas at once – financial constraints - but we can get behind them and so they've essentially written our climate plan for us....Some stuff didn't come up in the citizens' assembly so we'll take back more worked up version of ideas and add in those others, and check in with citizen assembly members and be very transparent about that." C1

Staff invited all participants who had expressed an interest in continuing to be involved to a follow-up meeting in early September, one month before the full council session. They explained that they had been exploring the integration of the actions within existing work programmes, and wanted to gather feedback on their progress as well as plan for the Council meeting. Out of the 37 potential attendees (those who had indicated they wanted to remain involved), around 20 signed up but only 14 ultimately attended, despite offers to accommodate any accessibility requirements. There was no payment for this meeting, and it was held in the evening; those who did attend also represented a less diverse group of residents than the full assembly.

"It was not very representative, only the most engaged. It is concerning as it means there is not as strong a mandate." F5

At the session, the team presented their development of the ideas into seven workstreams, based on a set of guiding principles which appear to have been developed internally, although this was never explained. They included 'faithfulness to the Assembly proposals', 'alignment with existing Council workstreams' and 'evidence-based'. Within these workstreams, the assembly recommendations were largely absorbed by examples of existing activity or other priorities that the Sustainability team will include in their final plan. The home/neighbourhood/council levels had vanished, and there was one workstream – 'green business' – which did not include any of the assembly recommendations at all. Attendees were then asked for their feedback, and what they felt was missing – one participant expressed surprise and confusion at the disappearance of the original levels in which the ideas had been generated. In the ensuing discussion, new ideas were added which appeared to come from the personal interests and knowledge of those in the room.

This session highlighted and perpetuated some of the more problematic aspects of the assembly process, and also to some extent risked undermining it. Firstly, it suggested that the recommendations produced were insufficient, at least in some ways. Whilst this is not necessarily an issue in and of itself, given that they were always intended for inclusion in a bigger sustainability plan, it was not made clear to the participants that their ideas may not translate directly. Similarly, the absorption of the majority of ideas into existing workstreams, whilst positive in terms of their potential implementation, does indicate that the recommendations produced were to some extent merely replicating what would already have been included in a new plan. As discussed earlier, this could have been mitigated through improving awareness of Camden's existing activities and providing more time to consider issues around feasibility and impact.

"In the case of the ideas generated by the citizens' assembly, I am not sure if they are enough – I think we could have gone further with our ideas and what we can do." CT1

“Some of the recommendations were vague, and we have been working on those – at the end of the third session we didn’t have something ready to go to the council. So we needed to work on them, and have the extra session.” CT3

“The follow-up meeting was odd, it reintroduced stuff that had fallen out of the process, based on evidence. That did make sense. But it also indicated that the original ideas therefore weren’t evidenced-based enough.” I4

“The addition of other ideas at the follow-up meeting felt like they had a set to begin with and were maybe filling in the gaps?” I2

The session itself again felt rushed, and given the low attendance, raised legitimate concerns about how democratic and open the process was. It is unclear whether other assembly members who could not attend were given the chance to comment on developments, or who else beyond the participants was doing so. This was particularly concerning when ideas had been changed significantly; for example, there was a suggestion to turn a scrutiny panel into a ‘design board’. The discussion which ensued with those participants present suggested that this would now be reconsidered.

“It is good to check the actions but more validation is needed, ideally. Are they being checked and circulated, or shared more widely?” F5

Two participants volunteered to speak at the full council meeting, which took place on 7th October 2019. The council chamber was unusually full, as commented on by numerous councillors during the debate, but the audience was largely comprised of XR activists (who were also speaking during the meeting). There seemed to be very few, if any, additional assembly participants or facilitators, a number of whom had indicated their interest in attending. The meeting began with a video of the citizens’ assembly, followed by presentations from the assembly representatives as well as others from organisations across Camden. Despite being the main ‘next step’ announced at the final assembly session, the assembly itself actually featured very little in the debate that followed, which focused more generally on Camden’s declaration of and potential response to the climate emergency.

“The meeting was OK but it felt like a lot of empty rhetoric rather than actual firm commitments to any specific actions. We’ve been told the action plan will be developed but that they don’t currently have the finances to support it? Others have mentioned too that it was great being brought into the loop on council thinking and coming up with ideas, but at the end of it all they feel like they just walk away and that’s it.” I3

This sense of disappointment goes back to the earlier difficulties around the clarity of communications and expectation management of this assembly as a whole. Nevertheless, the clear message Camden themselves have taken from this process is the importance of communication and engagement around the climate and their activity.

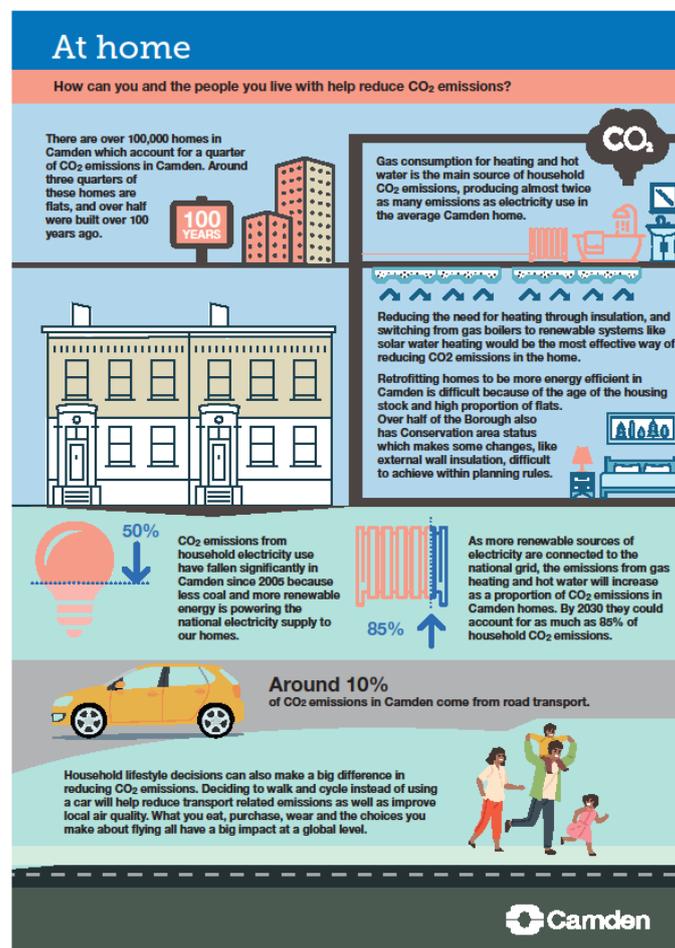
“We can still do a plan of what we think is best but now we know what people care about to get buy in, e.g. a social action projects to engage people and spend time on working with residents about what they associate with climate change. We know where we should give time and get people’s time, and we’ll just do the boring ones. That was a good thing to work out.” CT2

“If you don’t hear from us... we are working behind the scenes, please nudge us” Comment from Camden staff member at the follow-up session

Even in the few months since the assembly, this has already begun to materialise. At the Council meeting, it was announced that the Sustainability team would expand with new roles focused on maximising the opportunities for community involvement. The council also moved very quickly into piloting a climate focused 'Think & Do' pop-up, which had been mooted before the citizens' assembly process but aligned with its recommendations. This has hosted a range of climate activities with and by local organisations and the wider community, including at least one session involving the assembly's recommendations. All assembly members have been contacted specifically about this and other local opportunities, and two are now part of a co-design group for the public information campaign called for by the assembly.

"In previous citizens' assemblies we've struggled to keep the attendees energy – how to keep them informed, connected, understand their input on policy. We've tried to learn from this, be really clear about what happens next, and check back in with group." C1

Whilst the process from engagement to action has perhaps not quite achieved this ambition as yet, it is clear that Camden are learning from the "missed opportunities" (12) relating to community engagement with the climate crisis, which was one of their key aims for the assembly. In future exercises, clarity of communication and expectations around the next steps and developing a clear plan for maintaining participant involvement before the assembly actually takes place, would be valuable. A more discrete assembly process, providing participants with information about other relevant opportunities, and providing multiple ways to be involved in developing recommendations or taking action, would overcome some of the confusion and disappointment that a few participants experienced.



Discussion and Concluding Remarks

There is a clear shift within local policy and decision-making (not only within Camden) to increase participatory, inclusive and multi-stakeholder processes which support engagement and involvement. A range of deliberative methodologies can enable this, including citizen juries, citizens' panels, participatory budgeting, and neighbourhood forums. But what they really mean and what is actually involved is not always entirely clear; this evaluation has taken an in-depth, critical look into the processes and outcomes of Camden Council's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis in order to explore the impact of decisions and structural factors which shaped it.

Participating in Camden's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis was a positive experience for almost everyone involved, resulting in improved knowledge and confidence, changed behaviour and a stronger sense of connection to Camden. However, this is not the point of a citizens' assembly – they are deliberative processes aiming to build consensus and legitimacy around responses to contested policy issues. As such, while there were many aspects that worked well in the planning and delivery of Camden's climate assembly, this evaluation has also exposed aspects which did not work so well.

Citizens' assemblies have the potential to open up a new political space and forge new forms of decision-making, involving a shift in the balance of power between policy makers and residents. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that citizens' assemblies, like all participatory processes, are 'messy'. All those involved – from assembly members to speakers, and facilitators to organisers – bring a multitude of perspectives, interpretations and agendas, so are unlikely to share the same values, expectations and goals. Opening up decision-making in this way requires supportive structures to aid consensus-building, such as small group deliberation and voting exercises. Unfortunately, the implementation of these in Camden's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis proved problematic, leaving some frustrated.

In particular, there was and is a lack of transparency in the pathway from the initial ideas, to the final recommendations and the emerging workstreams. The idea generation process was thorough in obtaining multiple contributions through a range of mechanisms (i.e. roundtables, schools workshops, CommonPlace and the 'Green Room' space during the assembly meeting), but the difficulty lay in how these were incorporated within the citizen assembly process, and how they have been translated since. For instance, the final 17 ideas are now open to interpretation by those tasked with developing Camden's response, and some of the ideas may not be realistic or achievable within the available budget or time. If council staff develop the ideas into what they as professionals think best, without wider consultation, then there is a risk that the assembly will be seen as false or ineffectual.

The fundamental cause of this was the lack of criteria to develop ideas in reference to, or compare them against, during the assembly itself. During the follow-up meeting, Camden staff shared a set of principles they were adhering to in their workstream development, but these had not been co-created with assembly members. A set of shared principles and criteria could have been agreed within the citizens' assembly, producing stronger ideas which would need less follow-up work and giving council staff a mandate to take ideas forward through a transparent and accountable process. This would have represented a transfer of power from traditional decision-makers.

Nevertheless, Camden Council has a strong commitment to moving towards more resident-led policymaking. This was clear in the amount of work put in to the citizens' assembly, and their ability to identify, understand and reflect on challenges during the process, and seek ways to address them. From bringing an initially hostile XR on board, to demonstrating through words and actions that they

were genuinely listening to assembly members, it is commendable how willing staff were to engage with conflict, and accept and work with difference.

“Through this process officers have had a huge part in it, listening to recommendations, etc. That connection between officers and community has been real strength, brought depth.” C1

Decisions taken by Camden Council during the design, implementation and response to the citizens’ assembly process involved trade-offs at every stage – in short, a balance between what was gained, and the costs associated with such decisions. Furthermore, these gains and costs played out differently for different stakeholders, due to their roles, responsibilities, positionality and relationship to the citizens’ assembly, and for different aspects of the assembly process itself. For instance, the involvement of Camden staff in facilitating and designing the assembly process raised questions around impartiality for some participants and external parties, but for those staff it built capacity and motivation for their job. Similarly, if more time had been built in to the process, as suggested by multiple stakeholders, this may have affected the retention of participants. No decision is without both gains and costs, but taking the time to understand what these costs might be, and preparing or responding to them, can go some way towards mitigating them.

This evaluation was commissioned to support Camden Council’s learning around their participation and engagement processes. It has explored the impact of decisions and structural factors that influenced what happened during their Citizens’ Assembly on the Climate Crisis through drawing on the experiences of a range of stakeholders and impartial observations. By doing so, it becomes possible to step back and question the underlying assumptions of such engagement activities, and identify recommendations for future practice. Above all, clarifying the intended aims of any such activity (both internally and externally), before it takes place, is vital. The nature, scope and boundaries of engagement needs to be clearly defined; this should ideally include both its expected output and the mechanisms through which this will be achieved. Without clearly communicating this, alongside transparency around levels of power and agency for those involved, residents’ expectations may be unrealised, effectiveness of the outputs reduced, and trust in the council and its processes undermined.



Final Recommendations for Decision Makers

This section brings together the learning from the evaluation findings to propose five key recommendations for decision-makers (anyone leading participation and engagement activities, within Camden Council or otherwise) when planning and developing future participation and engagement activities.

The recommendations below encompass the concepts of *power, transparency and decision-making*, which underpinned the evaluation framework and are central to the delivery of citizens' assemblies and similar exercises. Transferring decision-making power to a small group of citizens and indirectly involving much larger group of invested stakeholders will always be a complex and contested process. Maintaining transparency about the purpose, scope and boundaries of an activity - and demonstrating a genuine commitment to change the balance of power in decision-making through reflection, learning and communication - will support its effectiveness and ultimately result in improved policy-making and trust in political processes.

Determine the method of participation and engagement in relation to the aims of the activity

- Clarify the aims and scope of the activity before deciding on the method of participation or engagement.
- Ensure the aims are clearly understood and shared by internal and external stakeholders.
- Choose the method which is most suited to achieving the aims, rather than that which is currently popular or fits with a wider agenda.
- If the method has been pre-determined, consider running supplementary activities alongside it which will support the intended outcomes.

Provide sufficient time for all aspects of the process

- Map all stages of the process from inception through to policy implementation, and allocate time accordingly.
- Carefully consider the length and number of sessions required, especially if the topic is complex or contested, and err on the side of caution where possible.
- Build in time to brief staff before and after each session.
- Prioritise the participation of citizens rather than the needs of the council when deciding on dates.

Establish a shared basis for decision making

- Use a values setting exercise to co-create a decision making framework with participants and generate shared principles to refer back to. This supports equitable participation regardless of inequalities in power, knowledge or confidence.
- Use the framework and principles to guide policy development and action-planning following the activity. This establishes a direct connection with the participants' recommendations and conveys legitimacy on subsequent decisions taken by the council.

Prioritise communication

- Clearly communicate the purpose, scope and boundaries of the activity before it begins, in order to manage expectations.
- Clarify the different roles and responsibilities of those involved in the process upfront.
- Ensure participants are aware of the context in which they are participating, e.g. existing policies, resource limitations, timelines, etc.
- Be as transparent as possible with all aspects of the participation and engagement process, e.g. the timely publication of documents, live-streaming, etc.
- Maintain regular dialogue with participants after the activity has finished and actively involve them in follow-up activity, where possible.

Support reflection and learning

- Commission an evaluation to critically assess the process and impact of the activity.
- Plan and commission the evaluation concurrently with planning the activity itself, and open up the process as much as possible.
- Build in reflection points throughout the process to assess what is working and what could be improved as the activity is ongoing – don't be afraid to make changes if necessary.
- Ensure a diverse range of perspectives and experiences are represented in the evaluation.
- Develop a plan for sharing and acting on learning internally and externally, ensuring it is incorporated into future activities, e.g. through the creation of protocols or quality checklists.



Appendix 1: Evaluation Framework

We are undertaking an evaluation of Camden Council’s Citizens’ Assembly on the Climate Crisis (CA), evaluating its processes and outcomes to create an evidence base for learning and strategic planning for Camden Council. We are interested in participants and policy makers and other actors’ experiences in the process of involvement and how it affects attitudes, behaviours, actions and practice.

The framework presented in the table below draws out the factors which influenced the process and outcomes of the CA, in relation to its planning, implementation and impact. These are grouped into cross-cutting themes, underpinned by the concepts of power, transparency and decision making. These have been identified through brief literature search, discussions with the project delivery team and an understanding of the context of the CA within Camden Council:

Institutional capacity	Content	Structure & Timing	Managing expectations	Participation and agency	Engagement to action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Internal drivers -Political process -Wider agenda for CAs and resident-led policymaking at Camden -External drivers -Pressures/ expectations -shared delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topic chosen; - Information provided; -Speakers and range of perspectives presented; -Framing of problem-solving and ideation; -Content and context of discussions; - Proposals generated; -How and if the framing question for the CA is addressed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Logistics - locations, timing, number of participants; - Participant recruitment and representation; -Session plan and development; -Facilitation – independence, impartiality, training; - Facilitation – group set up; - Role of other actors (i.e. steering group, Involve, The Democratic Society) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Clarity of the purpose of the CA in this context; - How the CA is described and by whom; -Expectations generated for participants, residents, Local Authority, and wider audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Wider participation – online platform, schools engagement, business engagement; - Ability of participants to participate - knowledge, power, stakeholder dynamics, facilitation; - Levels of participation; -Practical enablers and barriers; - Subjective experience of participants - enjoyment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development and implementation of outputs and ideas; - Participant involvement - Associated engagement opportunities provided
Power, transparency, decision-making					

Appendix 2: Interview Guides

Example interview guide (Facilitators)

	Questions and prompts	Evaluation themes
1	Can you start by telling me about your role in relation to the Citizens' Assembly?	Warm up and context of participant's role
2	What is your understanding of the context and purpose of the CA?	Aims/context, language and clarity
3	How were you prepared for facilitating the CA?	Facilitation and involvement of Involve
4	Can you share your reflections on the content and structure of the CA?	Content and structure
5	Can you share your reflections on the practicalities of the CA?	Accessibility, structure,
6	Now can you share your reflections on how the process enabled or hindered participation?	Participation and agency, power, perceptions of participant experience
7	How successful do you think the CA was at achieving its aims and answering the question it set out to? We are now facing a climate and ecological crisis. How can the Council and the people of Camden help limit the impact of climate change while protecting and enhancing our natural environment? What do we need to do in our homes, neighbourhoods and council?	Language, reputation and reception
8	Moving on to think about your own experience:	Facilitation – independence, preparation, structure, agency.
9	Has being involved in the CA had any impact on your practice, your work, or on you personally?	Outcomes
10	What do you expect to happen next, in terms of process or wider outcomes from the CA, both in relation to Climate but also across LBC more generally?	Political/institutional change and legacy, policy process, wider landscape, implementation and next steps

	Questions and prompts	Evaluation themes
11	<p>Would you consider this to be an ambitious project for Camden Council?</p> <p>If yes, what makes it ambitious and different to what would normally be done? Why was that possible on this project? If no, what would it take to make this more ambitious?</p>	<p>Political/institutional processes and change, policy process, capacity.</p>

Appendix 3: Identification Codes

- P Participant (feedback forms)
- I Participant interviewee
- CT Core Team
- C Councillor
- F Facilitator
- LF Lead Facilitator
- CR Community Researcher
- S Speaker
- SG Steering Group Member