

POWERED BY PEOPLE

Putting the public at the heart
of everything we do

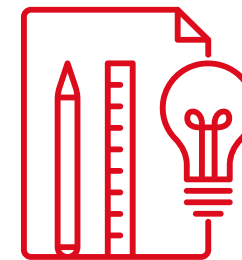


BE BOLD BE BIRMINGHAM

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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This is our first Public Participation Vision & Approach for Birmingham City Council. The approach and vision have been developed by Collaborate CIC on behalf of the Strategy, Equalities and Partnerships Directorate with the support of the public participation team, steering group, and community of practice.

It is part of the development of a new, coordinated corporate approach to public participation utilising best practise in this area.

To develop the ideas in this document we have:

- Reviewed current published strategies and plans
- Interviewed 30+ people responsible for or engaged in participation activity on behalf of the Council
- Established the steering group as a cross-functional set of participation champions
- Held a workshop with practitioners, forming the basis of an on-going Community of Practice
- Co-created, tested and iterated core framework content.

The framework consists of this document, setting out our vision and approach, and an implementation guide. At a steering group meeting in February 2023, it was agreed that the approach would be a public facing document setting out the Council's aspirations for public participation, with a foreword by the Deputy Leader and published as a set of participation commitments.

The implementation guide will be an internal document, outlining how the framework will be embedded into practice across the organisation.

The framework will be supported by a Methods Toolkit to be developed by the Public Participation team.



FOREWARD

Birmingham is a very special place to live, the diversity of the city and size makes me proud to call it home. As Deputy Leader of Birmingham City Council, I know that it is not places and structures that make it a great place – it's people – those citizens who work, live and visit here. This is why we, as officers and members, have a duty to listen to what these citizens tell us, and where we can, act on that insight citizens provide.

This new approach for public participation sets out our clear vision and approach for engaging citizens building on our Council priorities of putting citizens first. Whether this in service design or delivery, we must start, where we are not already doing so, talk to those who are the experts by their own personal experience. Whether this is because they have lived in the city for years or recently come here from a worn torn country, we have a duty to provide all citizens the opportunities to influence and design services that they want and those that will meet their needs.

Birmingham's diversity and scale allows us to be the best in our field, working closing with our partners in the city, we must begin to consistently hear and act on what citizen tells us, and if not, be open and transparent and tell citizens why we can't. Openness and transparency is key to building trusting relationships between ourselves and citizens, doing what we say we are going to do is always a good place to start.

We have six principles of participation detailed in this document, no one is any more important than any of the others, each of them allows us to start building trusting relationships and provide citizens and communities with opportunities for participation that meets their needs, at a time that suits them and in a way that works for them.

This approach and vision is complemented by a toolkit which provides council officers support to do this to the best of their ability or contacts to seek more advice and support. We are asking all officers to consistently work differently by putting citizens first, spending time to listen and act on the insight we gain.

There are already some areas of best practice, but we can always improve and do things more creatively and we must always remember that one size does not fit all and therefore we will ensure that our participation opportunities offer a selection of choices rather than simply one.

This vision and approach is just a start to standardise our practice city wide, I for one am already committed to working with citizens and acting on what they tell us, so I will continue to lead by example, therefore I so expect the same of my colleagues and peers. I hope that you all understand the importance of working differently with the citizens of Birmingham we are here to serve regardless of your role or level of responsibility – we all have a duty as public servants to provide every opportunity to listen and give citizens a chance to engage and make a difference.

Councillor Sharon Thompson
Deputy Leader

BE BOLD, BE BIRMINGHAM¹

The eyes of the world were on Birmingham in 2022, as the Commonwealth Games propelled Birmingham to the forefront, showing the world what a proud, young, creative, vibrant and diverse city Birmingham is.

From the vibrant street art scene in Digbeth to our ambitious plans for cleaner air, Birmingham is a unique city which has always sought to improve, grow and do better.

Birmingham can have it all, but we all have a part to play. We need to be bold, to recognise what is great about Birmingham but also what we can do to be even better - and work together to make it so.

SIX GRAND CHALLENGES²

We are honest about the challenges we face as a city. But our ambitions are allied with a commitment to face these challenges head on and deliver the changes and improvements needed for our city and the people who live, work and play here.

The Corporate Plan 2022 to 2026 sets out how the Council will deliver, enable and influence in the context of six 'grand challenges':

- 1. Equalities and inclusion**
- 2. Unemployment, skills and the local economy**
- 3. Opportunities for children and young people**
- 4. Community resilience, cohesion and living standards**
- 5. Health and wellbeing**
- 6. Climate emergency.**

These challenges are complex and difficult to solve. No single organisation, even one of the scale of Birmingham City Council, can solve them on its own. We need to make this journey together - in collaboration and partnership with the people of Birmingham and the other organisations that serve and support them.

There is far less public money available than before and many communities are stretched, both within families and local organisations. We need to avoid making promises we cannot keep and explore different ways of doing things and of making the most of everything we've got.

We also recognise that we will have to work hard to build stronger relationships between the City Council and neighbourhood organisations and to grow confidence and trust in those relationships. That means becoming a more "can do" organisation when it comes to helping residents solve the problems they face. Sometimes this may mean recognising where we are not best placed to lead - and instead need to support local people and their associations to discover, connect and mobilise the assets that already exist within their communities.



PARTNERING WITH THE PUBLIC TO CREATE A BETTER BIRMINGHAM

ACHIEVING OUR VISION WILL ONLY BE POSSIBLE IF WE WORK TOGETHER.

To make our ambitions for Birmingham achievable we know we must work in partnership with the public - the people for whom the city is a home, a place to raise families, to find fulfilling work, build communities, have fun, and grow old.

We will support organisations, communities, and citizens themselves to create change for themselves, improve the areas in which they live, shape the world around them, and enable everyone to play their part.

We will put the public first in everything we do, providing services that are reliable, and joined-up around their needs. We will ensure our decision-making is informed by empathy and by high-quality insight, built from data and people's lived experiences. and we will work closely with our communities and create opportunities for their voices to be listened to and heard. We will actively seek out and listen to those most affected by inequalities, putting their voices at the heart of designing solutions.

We will move towards our vision by pulling together as a city and having genuine pride in who we are and belief in what we can achieve. We will play our part in building trust and promoting democratic participation and community power in everything we do.³

OUR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOALS

1. Empower residents to shape the places in which they live

2. Transform services to better meet the needs of the people they serve

3. Build the capacity of communities to provide networks of support that avoid, reduce or delay demand for services

4. Build trusting relationships with and between communities to increase democratic participation and social cohesion

WE WILL CENTRE EQUITY IN ALL THAT WE DO.

We need to build on the way we worked with communities during the COVID-19 pandemic to shift our relationships to be more equal and trusting. The pandemic brutally exposed many of the injustices that disfigure our economy and society. But these injustices are not new; they were present well before the virus changed our lives. The pandemic merely deepened them, yet again showing how for too many people, opportunities are closed off because of their race, their class, their gender, their disability – or a combination of these factors. This has never been acceptable to the City Council. In the post COVID-19 world, we know that building back better is not enough on its own. We have to build back fairer, too⁴.

We need to make sure we have equitable relationships across all our communities, getting beyond the usual voices. We also need to get better at learning from each other and coordinating our activity across different teams and locations.



OUR ELECTED MEMBERS WILL BE CRUCIAL. WE WILL HARNESS THE STRENGTHS AND KNOWLEDGE OF COUNCILLORS IN UNDERSTANDING THEIR WARDS AND REPRESENTING LOCAL VOICES.

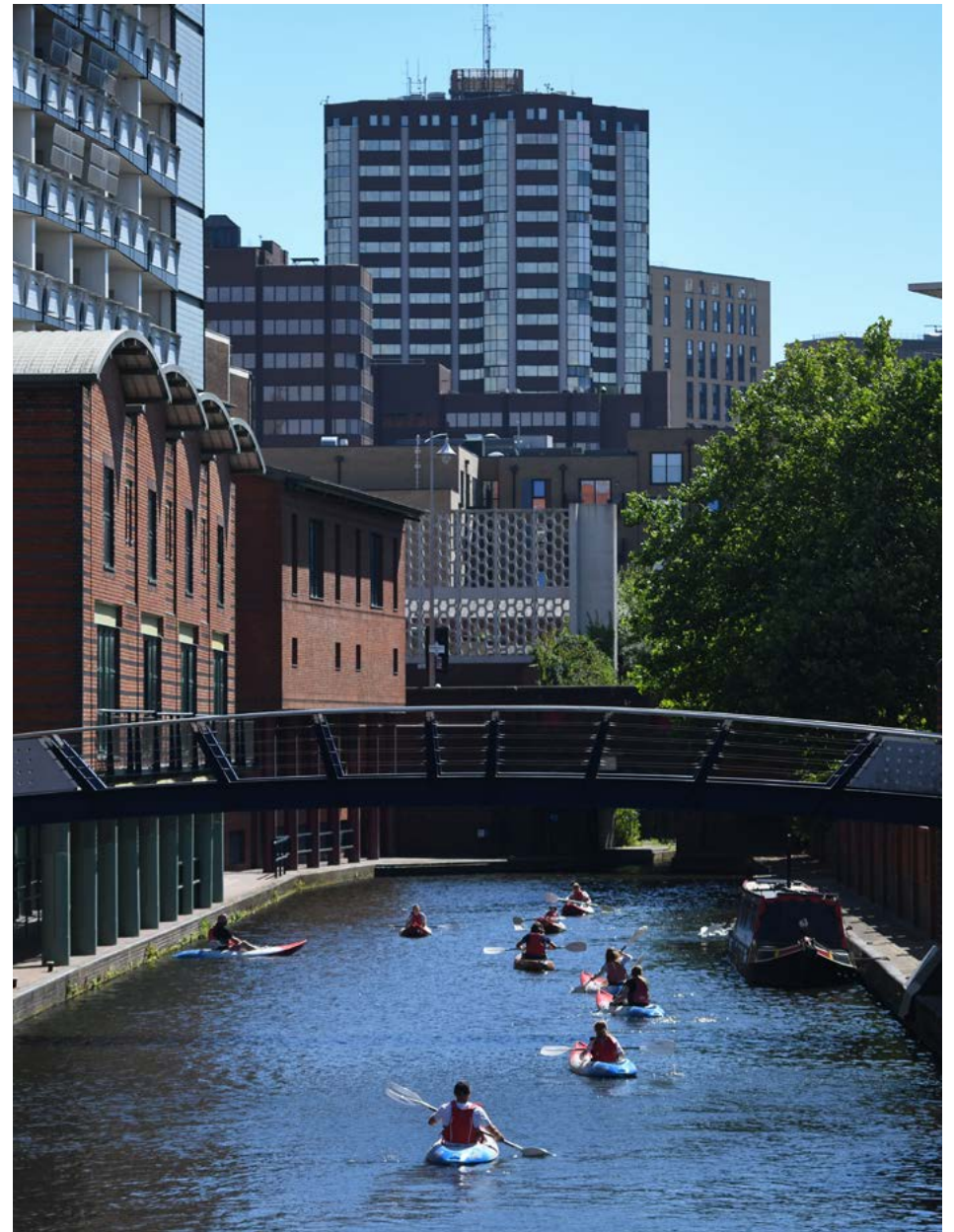
We'll support them to work with the full range of people and organisations in their wards to coordinate different interests, reconcile diverse views and encourage open debate and dialogue, so that more people will be encouraged to take part in building better lives for themselves and their communities.

To help us make progress on this journey, we have created a new directorate within the Council focused on generating and sharing insight and building our partnership with the public.

It hosts the Birmingham City Observatory⁵, a free and open data-sharing platform, which will help us understand Birmingham better.

And a dedicated Public Participation team to champion, enable, support and facilitate public participation in all areas of council business.

This team will own the new approach, making sure it becomes embedded across the Council in a way that enables the people of Birmingham to inform, influence and affect change to all Council decisions and activities.



OUR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PRINCIPLES

The eyes of the world were on Birmingham in 2022, as the Commonwealth Everyone undertaking public participation activity for, or on behalf of, Birmingham City Council will be guided by the principles below.

They are intended to ensure that a high level of consistency runs through all the work we do in partnership with the public, whether activity takes place within neighbourhoods, with communities of interest or experience, with service users or residents or across Birmingham as a whole.

They reflect and support existing local practice and have been developed based on the work already taking place in Birmingham, from conversations with leaders and practitioners and from national and international best practice.

1. We will be inclusive, accessible and fair

2. We will be respectful

3. We will act openly, honestly and with integrity

4. We will collaborate

5. We will shift power to communities

1. WE WILL BE INCLUSIVE, ACCESSIBLE AND FAIR

by actively seeking out and facilitating the public's participation in the things that matter to them, particularly people who find it harder to take part or struggle to be heard, so that everyone's voice matters.

What this looks like:

- Build our knowledge and understanding of the everyday lived realities of those people who are seldom heard, rather than relying on the 'usual' community representatives.
- Design and deliver our services with consideration of the faith and cultural identities of our diverse communities, and how these identities intersect across ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation and social class, to deliver culturally informed services.

- Seek out and facilitate the participation of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision, removing any barriers that may be experienced by particular groups.
- Involve a diverse range of people with different perspectives and experiences (particularly those from marginalised or seldom heard groups and those who experience barriers to access), fulfilling our duty of care to support participants and enable active participation.
- Use participation methods appropriate to people's needs, and ensure participants feel valued, welcome and able to express themselves freely, regardless of culture and beliefs.

2. WE WILL BE RESPECTFUL

by showing that the public is our most important resource, and their contributions and needs are valued, respected and acted on.

What this looks like:

- Enhance and build on the talents, experiences, skills and assets within local communities, ensuring they are recognised, valued and respected.
- Listen to and act on the opinions of users of our services, whether it is solicited or not, building their feedback into our decision-making processes to enable continuous improvement.
- Reduce duplication by understanding what is already known and what has already been asked, who has already contributed and how, before designing new participation activities.
- Take time to plan and properly resource participation and start involving people in any process as early as possible.
- Show we value the time of those taking part in public participation activities by managing the process well, including protecting any data or confidences that may be shared.

3. WE WILL ACT OPENLY, HONESTLY AND WITH INTEGRITY

by freely providing information so people can participate in a meaningful way and fostering a culture of sharing ideas and feeding back results.

What this looks like:

- Take the time to build trusting relationships, to listen and understand people's priorities.
- Be clear why we are seeking participation and how people's views will shape the decisions being made, making sure we are clear about the constraints so that everyone knows from the start what can or cannot be changed.
- When we must make decisions alone, we will explain from the outset what the decision-making process will be. Afterwards, we will explain how a decision was made and show how participants made a difference.

4. WE WILL COLLABORATE

by working in partnership with people, communities and the other organisations working with, for, or alongside them. We will be mindful of the different power relationships at play and seek to share and shift our power where possible.

What this looks like:

- Plan together across the Council and the local partners so that public participation is co-ordinated, making the most of each other's skills and networks.
- Support and build on existing activities, networks, forums and venues which already bring people together and build strong partnerships with VCSE, Faith and other local organisations to harness their knowledge and relationships with local communities. (We recognise that when resources are limited organisations may need financial support and capacity building to take on partnership roles).
- Collect, combine and make use of all available sources of both quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (stories) data about the needs, aspirations and experiences of people who want to shape a place, or use (or could/should use) our services.

5. WE WILL SHIFT POWER TO COMMUNITIES

by enabling people and communities to play an active role in shaping the places where they live and in the decisions that affect them.

What this looks like:

- Build power at a community level, nurturing citizen-led action and community cohesion.
- Build the voices of the public into governance structures so that people are part of all decision-making processes, including service commissioning, design and delivery, in a demonstrable way.
- Invest in encouraging people and communities to get involved, particularly those seldom heard, and help them develop appropriate skills, knowledge and confidence to contribute effectively to decision-making.



OUR APPROACH TO PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

At Birmingham City Council (and throughout this document) we use 'public participation' as an umbrella term. It describes an approach that encompasses all the different ways in which people who work for, or on behalf of, the City Council can work together with the public to achieve the four public participation goals above.

We are committed to seeking the participation of the public in everything that we do. And to being guided by our principles. But we are a big organisation responsible for many different things. This means that there will always be a wide variety of ways to participate and not all participation will look the same.

It may range from listening to a voter's views on the doorstep, to consulting over changes to a road layout, to helping redesign a service, to jointly deciding the allocation of small grants or being directly involved in the delivery of a neighbourhood garden.

We have identified six broad types of participation and created a model that we will use to guide us in choosing the best method for each purpose and consistently delivering to the highest standard.

Below is more detail about these six types of participation, including a promise to the public for each type, to help people understand what they can expect from us when they take part in participation activities. We've also set out what we're hoping to achieve with each type of participation and included some examples of what this can look like in practice.

We are determined that all these opportunities to contribute will be high quality. And that we make the most of all the insight we are given to shape our decisions and actions. We will connect our research activities with our public participation activities to develop as rich a picture of the city as possible. And we will use our understanding of specific communities to target our activities - and ensure we're talking to the right people about the right things.

GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH SHARING POWER

If this approach to public participation is to achieve its full potential, we know we must get comfortable with letting go of some control and handing the public more power to shape their city and the services we provide. This includes actively seeking out, hearing and acting on the uncomfortable stories about things that aren't right. We understand how frustrating it can be to take part and then not see any apparent change, so we commit to providing feedback after all participation activity – even if what's been proposed can't be implemented for whatever reason.

We will need to develop the collective skills to achieve this consistently across the whole Council, while continuing to fulfil our legal and democratic responsibilities.



OUR SIX TYPES OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

CONVERSE	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Listen to and connect with people.	Tell people what is happening or being planned in ways that are engaging, easy to understand and accessible.	Offer ideas or options and respond to feedback.	Encourage others to provide information, insights and opinions to join in considering the best way forward.	Work together to jointly explore, design and deliver.	Enable people to shape where they live and the services they rely on.

WE PROMISE WE WILL...

Listen to your experiences and ideas so we can understand you better.	Keep you informed and up-to-date; we will help you understand what we are doing and why	Tell you about changes we're planning, listen to and acknowledge your opinions, and let you know how public input influenced any decision made.	Work with you so that your ideas and concerns directly shape the solutions developed.	Work together to come up with ideas, to make decisions and carry them out.	Help you shape the places and services you care about.
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IN DOING THIS WE AIM TO...

Build trusting, productive relationships between the Council and the public through dialogue; capture insight from informal and formal discussions that shapes what we do.	Provide balanced and objective information to help people understand issues, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions; to signpost people to organisations and provisions that meet their needs.	Gain public feedback on insight, options and/or decisions; to fulfil our legal duties.	Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently considered and understood.	Work together with the public to develop and deliver better solutions.	Support communities to discover, connect & mobilise their assets to shape the places in which they live & develop stronger networks of support; use our resources to complement civic efforts; recruit the public to shape the commissioning, design & evaluation of services.
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EQUITABLE, INCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

CONVERSE

LISTEN TO AND CONNECT WITH PEOPLE

- **Goal:**
To build trusting, productive relationships between the Council and the public through dialogue; capture insight from informal and formal discussions that shapes what we do.
- **Promise to the public:**
We will listen to your experiences and ideas so we can understand you better.

Examples in practice:

1. The Adult Social Care department has developed the Three Conversations® framework for social workers to get to know the citizens they are working with and better understand what they and their families or support networks are capable of and what they would like.
2. Within City Housing, Neighbourhood Officers visit Birmingham City Council tenants in their homes as part of the tenancy visit programme. These proactive visits prioritise the 'silent voices' - the people who are not heard from very often. A visit usually lasts half an hour and gives residents the chance to talk about any issues within their home or neighbourhood.
3. Housing Liaison Boards (HLB)⁷ are made up of volunteers. They are elected by Council tenants and leaseholders to represent them and help improve their area of Birmingham. There are local HLBs covering the wards in Birmingham with the highest concentration of council housing and a City HLB which brings together representatives from each of the local HLBs.
4. Each ward has a Ward Forum where residents can meet their local Councillors, Council staff, Police and other services to discuss the issues that matter most to them and get involved in what's happening in the area.

5. The Naturally Birmingham Future Parks project worked with local community groups to collect people's hopes and dreams for their favourite parks and green spaces. 247 'Earth Stories' capturing memories, experiences and thoughts for the future formed the foundation for the 25-year City of Nature Plan.
6. Birmingham Children's Partnership (BCP) and the Education Observatory carried out an ethnographic, qualitative research study exploring the lived experience of 30 local children and young people (CYP) and their families to inform the redesign of services. Using a participatory approach, families chose to share their experiences using various engaging and interactive data collection methods including discussions with a key worker already involved with the family, drawings, journal entries, photographs, and voice recordings.
7. The Public Health team, in partnership with health and voluntary organisations, worked to better understand the disproportionate mortality rates affecting Black mothers and babies by seeking out and listening to the experiences of women whose voices are rarely heard. This provided the base for the development of the Infant Mortality Strategy.



INFORM

TELL PEOPLE WHAT IS HAPPENING OR BEING PLANNED IN WAYS THAT ARE ENGAGING, EASY TO UNDERSTAND AND ACCESSIBLE

- **Goal:**
To provide balanced and objective information to help people understand issues, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions; to signpost people to organisations and provisions that meet their needs..
- **Promise to the public:**
We will keep you informed and up-to-date; we will help you understand what's available to you; what we are doing and why.

Examples in practice:

1. During the Covid-19 pandemic the Public Health team provided training to 890 Covid community champions and 20 voluntary sector organisations working with 31 different communities of identity and experience to help address concerns about vaccination. They also attended online ward forums with Councillors, CCG representatives and local GPs and shared information via radio, Facebook Q&As and online forums.
2. Working with the Neighbourhood Development Service Unit, the charity 'Economy' are offering Shift Birmingham⁸, a free training course for people across Birmingham, exploring how power and resources in the city can be rebalanced to improve local economies. As part of this, local theatre-makers Stan's Cafe are visiting community settings with special performances of All Our Money², a 50-minute exploration of the complexities of council budgets, told with the help of 6,000 gold blocks and a football mascot.
3. The Local Offer website gives guidance to people in search of organisations and support around Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), while the Connect to Support site offers an online information and advice guide, community directory and marketplace for citizens of Birmingham.

4. The Corporate Communications team provides information to citizens in Birmingham using social media, which is timely, accurate and updated as changes happen. This same information is shared on the City Council website for those who get regular updates from that platform.
5. The Ukrainian Programme team has worked with Refugee Action and community organisations such as Moseley4Ukraine.org to share messages for Ukrainian hosts and guests using WhatsApp groups. This has also enabled hosts and guests to form relationships and learn from each other's experiences. This feedback has now evolved into regular face to face and online engagement opportunities to provide continual feedback.



CONSULT

OFFER IDEAS OR OPTIONS AND RESPOND TO FEEDBACK

- **Goal:**
To gain public feedback on insight, options and/or decisions; to fulfil our legal duties.
- **Promise to the public:**
We will tell you about changes we're planning, listen to and acknowledge your opinions, and provide feedback on how public input influenced any decisions made.

Examples in practice:

1. The Be Heard website¹⁰ gives people the opportunity to give feedback on the issues they are interested in. These can be anything from budgets to recycling, and new homes to adult social care. Consultations range from changing a local school to become co-educational, improving public spaces in the city centre and designs for Phase 2 of the Sprint public transport rollout.
2. Trailblazers¹¹ was an in-depth enquiry into young people's attitudes to their city conducted with 240 Year 9 students from ten schools across the city. The young people explored unfamiliar areas, taking photographs which were published along with feedback and direct quotes as a brand new map of the city. This map was presented to the Lord Mayor at an event which brought all the participants together in discussion at the Council House before forming a Council of the Future in the Council Chamber, with Councillors joining teachers and other city stakeholders in the public gallery to watch the voting.
3. Planning officers co-produced the 'Our Future City Plan' with the People for Public Services Forum, following-up with deep dive focus groups on key areas.

4. Birmingham City Council and health partners consulted with members of the public on a dementia support strategy for the city. People were invited to contribute their thoughts and ideas on the proposals and feedback information about service needs. A feedback meeting was undertaken to share the outcomes about the difference made.



INVOLVE (DECIDING TOGETHER)

ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION, INSIGHTS AND OPINIONS TO JOIN IN CONSIDERING THE BEST WAY FORWARD.

- **Goal:**
To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently considered and understood.
- **Promise to the public:**
We will work with you so that your ideas and concerns directly shape any solutions developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced any decision.

Examples in practice:

1. To deliver the Birmingham and Lewisham African Caribbean Health Inequalities Review (BLACHIR), Birmingham City Council and Lewisham Council Public Health Divisions worked in partnership to gather insights on health inequalities within Black African and Caribbean communities in Lewisham and Birmingham. By listening to the lived experience of members of these communities, recognising their priorities, discussing, and reflecting on the findings we co-produced recommended solutions to shape the actions of the local Health and Wellbeing Board and NHS Integrated Care Systems.
2. Public Health and Thrive Together established a Birmingham Poverty Truth Commission to strengthen the connection between the Council, city partners and our citizens through learning from the lived experience of poverty and incorporating it into the policy and decision making. It is a citizen engagement approach to hold a mirror up to the Council and our strategic partners on the impact of poverty on citizens' lives and starts with listening to the people who really know what the sharp end of poverty looks like because they live it daily. Developing relationships between people with lived experience (community commissioners) and those in positions of power and influence (civic commissioners) over a period of time encourages those with influence to operate differently in their areas of work, enabling change at a wider level.
3. The 'People for Public Services Forum' is a monthly forum named, co-chaired and organised by citizens which enables council officers to seek citizens' views on a wide range of subjects, either as part of feedback or full consultation activity. Citizens feel empowered to influence the Council's approach across a wide range of activities.
4. The Birmingham Youth City Board¹² is a group of local young people aged 11 to 18 years old. Supported by the Youth Service, they work with Birmingham City Council and other partners to promote meaningful engagement with young people, connect them with the current work of partners around Birmingham and help create a city that provides for and benefits all generations. Members of the Youth City Board recently completed training to become Young Inspectors¹³, enabling them to give critical feedback to anyone working with young people to improve the quality of their work.
5. Colleagues from the Community Safety Team undertook 6 co-production sessions to seek citizens' views to influence the Council and its partners approach to the formulation of 'Birmingham's Strategy for Reducing Serious Violent Crime'. This document was formally submitted to Cabinet for agreement in January 2023.
6. The PURE employment project involved citizens in the co-production and delivery of the whole programme approach to how it supported citizens into employment from underprivileged areas of the city. The citizens informed the Council and its partners approach to the offer, organisation and support available to those people seeking employment. Activities included a marketplace conference session alongside a People for Public Services meeting and a number of additional focus groups to explore specific topics.
7. Shared Lives relaunched and co-produced their whole approach to how it recruits, promotes and supports people who wish to become Shared Lives Carers. Shared Lives Carers have people live with them in their homes who may otherwise not be able to manage independently. They teach life skills and provide support for regular living. Citizens were instrumental in reviewing the support offer from the service, reviewing promotional materials to make them more appealing and also now feature as full-time members of the panel which considers applications to become a Shared Lives Carer.

COLLABORATE (ACTING TOGETHER)

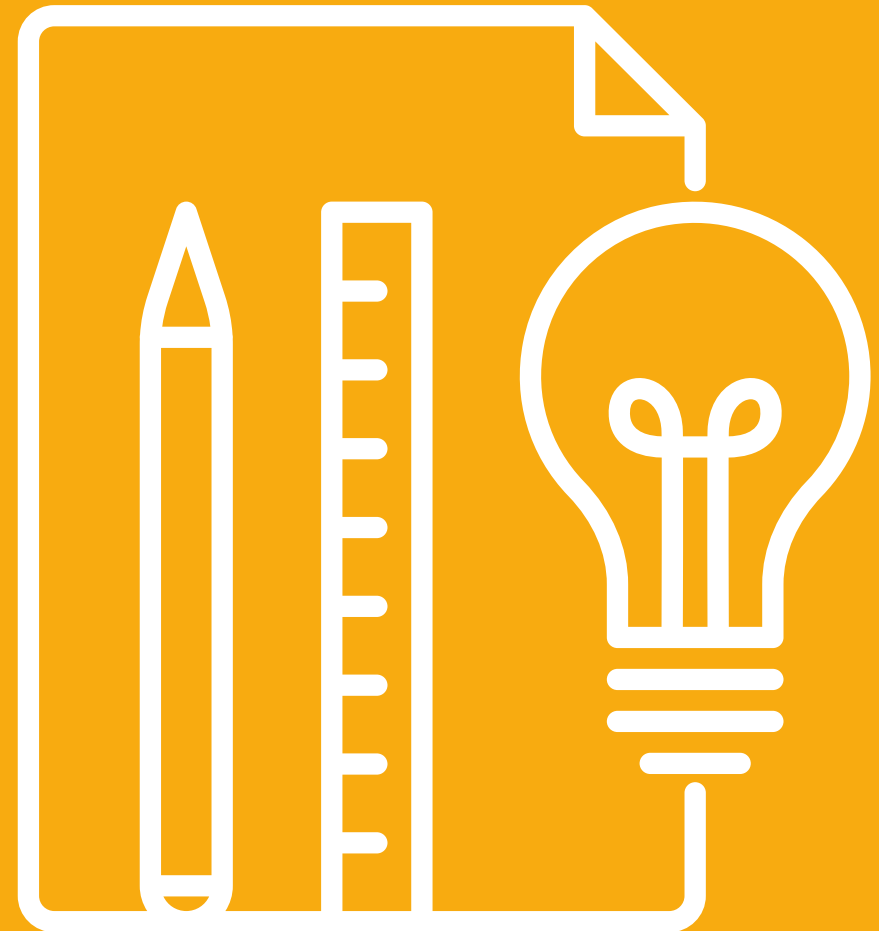
WORK TOGETHER TO JOINTLY EXPLORE, DESIGN AND/OR DELIVER.

- **Goal:**
To work together with the public to develop and deliver better solutions.
- **Promise to the public:**
We will work together to come up with ideas, to make decisions and carry them out.

Examples in practice:

1. The Community Research & Co-design Partnership¹⁴ recruited parents affected by youth violence to act as community researchers in Newtown & Lozells. 29 people were trained up and given the skills to go out and have conversations with their local community. They then developed reports which led to the creation of a local action plan to tackle local youth violence. They were able to get £1m in funding for local activities.
2. The Better Lives Alliance worked closely to support the establishment of a peer support group for direct payment recipients, including organising conferences, and setting up face to face and online engagement groups. Together, they reviewed learning and development courses, co-delivered a session, created a user-friendly flyer and fed back information into social work teams
3. Housing teams across the city have worked with diverse groups of residents to make neighbourhoods and estates more welcoming. As an example, in Rubery residents of a sheltered housing scheme were involved in co-designing a small community garden which was then delivered by the BMHT contractors.

4. The Preparation for Adulthood team, working with Birmingham Children's Trust, have established an active group of young people to inform the approach and service offer for others who were transitioning from Children's Social Care to Adult Social Care. The group, who named themselves the YES group (Youth Empowerment Squad) co-produced the support offer, gave lived experience feedback and helped launch the service to other young people who were moving through the care system.



EMPOWER

ENABLE PEOPLE TO SHAPE WHERE THEY LIVE AND THE SERVICES THEY RELY ON.

- **Goal:**
Support communities to discover, connect and mobilise their assets to shape the places in which they live and develop stronger networks of support; use our institutional resources to add to and complement civic efforts; enable the public to take part in the commissioning, design and evaluation of services.
- **Promise to the public:**
We will help you shape the places and services that matter to you.

Examples in practice:

1. The Neighbourhood Action Coordination small grants programme¹⁵ supports local community groups, charities, voluntary-led organisations, and projects, with grants of up to £2,000. Applications are considered by a panel consisting of local residents, stakeholders, and elected members.
2. The Neighbourhood Network Schemes¹⁶ (known as NNS) help older adults in Birmingham to lead healthy, happy and independent lives in their own homes and communities. By supporting and coordinating the work of voluntary, community and faith organisations with the public sector, in particular Adult Social Care and Health, NNS ensures that as many citizens over 50 as possible can access community-based activities, support and services.
3. Colleagues from the Early Intervention and Prevention team have worked with citizens in local locations (shops, community centres, local streets) in the first of its two pilot areas: Erdington and Northfield. The team has listened to local needs, supported local people and really made an impactful difference to the lives and income of a number of families. The team have initially focussed on homes and money and have actively supported 22 families.

4. The City Council have launched a small grant process for local community groups and individuals to apply for small pots of funding to enable local people to celebrate and recognise the 75th anniversary of Windrush. The activities and events organised by this process, or by those organisations already established, will feature on a dedicated website which will share details of the activities that members of the community can get involved in.



WHO DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY 'THE PUBLIC'?

Citizen. Resident. Community. Neighbourhood. Service User. Customer. We look for participation from people playing many different roles - and each can sit under the label 'public'. Many of our 12,453 employees are also residents of the city. But when speaking of communities in particular we recognise that there are different kinds and they're not always place-based.

- **Place:** Communities of people brought together by geographic boundaries.
- **Identity:** Communities of people brought together by shared identity, including faith, culture etc.
- **Experience:** People brought together by a common experience e.g. homelessness, living with diabetes.
- **Interest:** Communities of people who share the same interest or passion e.g. Friends of a Park, or a sports club.
- **Action:** Communities of people trying to bring about change.
- **Practice:** Communities of people in the same profession or who undertake the same activities.
- **Circumstance:** Communities of people brought together by external events/situations.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: COMMUNITIES TO FOCUS ON

We have developed specialisms in working with:

- Communities of experience, like the guests and hosts of the Homes4Ukraine programme, or people who care for family members with long term health conditions, or people who have experienced the care system.
We often work with communities of experience when we're developing or improving services. Or when we're shaping policies.
- Communities of identity, including people of a particular faith, culture, sexual orientation or gender identity¹⁷
Communities of identity are particularly important to our work on health inequalities and community cohesion.
- Communities of place can work at different scales. Sometimes we may work at the city scale, sometimes at the constituency or ward level, or more locally with neighbourhoods and sometimes with specific housing estates or schools.
Communities of place are the focus of our Neighbourhood Networks and those teams supporting Councillors to represent their residents through Ward Forum meetings and Ward Plans.

We sometimes need to work with communities of action, or interest. These groups can be quite different as they have a lifespan and character dictated by the circumstances that have brought them together. We will develop the skills to identify the kind of community we're working with and build the empathic relationships we need to work together effectively.

HOW WE'LL KNOW WE'RE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

If our public participation approach is helping us meet the four public participation goals, we will be able to see how it is making a difference - to the people who take part and how they feel about the Council, to the decisions and policies we make and how well aligned they are to the needs of the people they affect, to our projects, work programmes and the services we design and deliver.

We will know we're making progress when we can see:

- Policymakers understand who their policies will affect, seek out and listen to those people and design policies around their needs - and there is clear evidence of how they have done this.
- Services are routinely designed, commissioned, delivered and evaluated with the participation of people who use them or with people who may be affected by them.
- More people feel positive about the places where they live, feeling welcome and safe, and are actively involved in shaping those places.
- There is greater satisfaction with the way the Council runs things and fewer complaints about services.
- There is greater trust in the Council and higher levels of democratic participation.

We will find ways to track and evaluate our progress, learning and adapting our approach as we go.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

This Vision and Approach document will be supported by an Implementation Guide and a Methods Toolkit, which will enable us to bring our new approach to public participation to life over the next few years.



ENDNOTES

- 1 Adapted from Be Bold, Be Birmingham [article](#)
- 2 From Corporate Plan 2022-26 launch [article](#)
- 3 Adapted from Corporate Plan 2022-26
- 4 [Everyone's Battle Everyone's Business – together we will tackle inequalities](#)
- 5 [Birmingham City Observatory](#)
- 6 Watch [3 Conversations Film](#)
- 7 See [The Guide for Housing Liaison Boards in Birmingham](#)
- 8 See Shift Birmingham
- 9 See [All Our Money](#)
- 10 [BeHeard](#)
- 11 [Trailblazers](#)
- 12 [Birmingham Youth City Board](#)
- 13 See [Young Inspectors | a guidance framework](#)
- 14 See [Community Research & Co-design Partnership](#)
- 15 See [Neighbourhood action coordination small grants programme](#)
- 16 See [Neighbourhood Network Schemes in Birmingham](#)
- 17 To learn more about particular communities visit the community health profiles created by the Public Health team

