

COMMUNITY



Westminster City Council

Making Change Through Radical Listening In Westminster

Introduction

Change Makers is an applied training programme designed to enhance the understanding and engagement of Council Officers with Westminster's diverse communities. Funded by Health Education England, the programme focuses on three key areas: co-production, systems leadership, and justice.

An essential aspect of Change Makers is cultivating significant relationships within the community, facilitating the ongoing participation of key stakeholders in place-based initiatives as they progress. Each cohort is carefully assembled to include representatives from the Council, NHS, Police, and voluntary and community sector organisations, along with local residents.

Each Change Makers event follows a consistent format and spans two days with three facilitators.

Day One: This day is dedicated to Council and public service officers only. The focus is on exploring the methods and reasons behind community engagement, as well as identifying potential barriers.

Day Two: On this day, members of the community join the event, involving approximately 30-40 participants. Local food is provided, and lunchtime is considered an integral part of the learning experience, emphasising the importance of connections and relationships formed, which often outweighs the training content.

Co-production

Participants are introduced to concepts of co-production and power dynamics, learning how to empower communities to achieve better outcomes. This section involves discussing the ladder of participation and strategies to enhance community involvement in existing workstreams.

Justice

Participants reflect on how historical life opportunities may affect residents' participation and behaviour in consultation and engagement activities. This section, utilising a trauma-informed approach, aims to foster compassionate interactions.

Systems Leadership

Systems thinking considers the interconnected relationships among teams and society which impact decision-making processes. During this session, participants engage in deep listening exercises in groups of three, to gain diverse perspectives. Following this, they collaborate in co-producing questions, create 'rich pictures' of their ideas, and share these insights within their groups.

Co-production

The session concludes with residents taking ownership of the ideas generated at each table. Public sector staff circulate among the tables, offering insights, contacts, and support to make these ideas feasible and achievable. Officers then assume responsibility for these plans, considering how they can be implemented alongside decision-makers.

Theme

Each Change Makers has been commissioned by a Service that is seeking to achieve some outcomes for their work, including place-based work in areas of deprivation – North Paddington, Church Street, Pimlico wards, and the Communications strategy.

Themes have related to tackling health inequalities including through a JSNA on Global Majority Communities, ICB improving Access to Health Services and the Active Health Strategy.



ICB Change Makers co-production session- improving access to NHS services

Outcomes

The outcomes from the engagement sessions have led to the Council advancing further initiatives. Examples include communication initiatives, the creation of community hubs, and initiatives to improve access to health.

One early outcome was the creation of a community space called the Happy Hub. During this co-production session, the community chose not to discuss the main topic due to the recent closure of the local food bank, which was caused by the unsafe condition of a community building. Consequently, the session shifted to address the immediate community need and identified that such crises occurred frequently due to the lack of dedicated community space.

Throughout the two-day session, while carrying out co-production work, officers utilized their collective knowledge and contacts to work to solve the issues at hand. The community highlighted a key empty building owned by the local council that they wanted to be brought into use. However, this building was unsuitable due to serious flood damage, rendering the kitchen unsafe for occupancy. By the end of the two-day period, a temporary space had been identified for both the community hub and the food bank.

Following the leadership of community change makers, officers continued to support the refurbishment of the building, with one small charity stepping up to manage the venue with mentoring from our finance department. A budget was provided, and the community commissioned a local artist to collaborate with families in decorating the space. This initiative resulted in the establishment of [the Happy Hub](#) as a thriving community venue in one of Westminster's most deprived areas.

Through our place-based work, the Council has awarded several community grants to support emerging and established organisations in bringing forward ideas based on local community priorities. Many of these providers are now based at the Happy Hub. Additionally, over the following year, efforts have involved the community in co-producing a permanent community hub at Ernest Harriss House, known as [The Exchange](#).

Here are some comments from participants

"Having just started at the council, this experience helped me tap into decades of history in the room that I wouldn't have encountered in online meetings"

"This was a great reminder of how fast you can connect in a short amount of time. I've worked with the community for months and we've never had a personal conversation like this."

"You know I do actually think the workshop made a difference! Fingers crossed there are some big changes." - local resident

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