

Employment and Skills Outcomes Based Review (OBR) - London Borough of Brent

Cooperative Councils' Innovation Network, Policy Prototype Report

The Summary:

Brent Council's Employment and Skills Outcomes Based Review (OBR) project set out to explore residents' challenges in accessing employment and skills opportunities and support. Insights from research, stakeholders and community engagement was gathered and utilised to identify the key barriers that residents face to inform the development of prototypes that support prosperity, stability and thriving communities in the London Borough of Brent. Through its established Outcomes Based Review approach, Brent Council led a diverse group of stakeholders through four key phases: Discover, Define, Develop and Deliver.

The decision to conduct an OBR focused on employment and skills for Brent residents was informed by Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2021 Census findings which identified Brent's unemployment rate at 6.8%, compared to 4% regionally and 3.8% nationally. Regarding education, the 2021 Census found that 7.6% of Brent residents hold no qualification, in comparison to 5.5% regionally and 6.6% nationally. Exploring further within Brent, Stonebridge wards was identified as the most disadvantaged in comparison to other wards with an unemployment rate of 8.3%¹ and 20%² of the population hold no qualification indicated that Stonebridge was one of the most disadvantaged wards in Brent. Additionally, insights from a previous (2022-23) Cost-of-Living-themed OBR's identified related challenges for residents including a need for specialised skills and employment support to achieve long-term financial stability.

Following the earlier Cost-of-Living-themed OBR a 'Community Wellbeing Project' was established in Stonebridge in 2023. The project was delivered by Sufra NW London – a local food aid organisation – and aimed to provide preventive support to families to build financial and personal resilience. It operated on a 3-month membership model, were a £4 weekly fee provided members, and their families, with access to a comprehensive package of support including a weekly food shop worth approximately £25+, free meals at the daytime cafe and access to advice, guidance and health and wellbeing support from Brent Hubs and a timetable of specialist partners, all under one

¹ <https://data.brent.gov.uk/download/29wly/yyg/2021%20Census%20-%20Economic%20Activity%20-%20topic%20report%20-%202004.08.23%20AV.pdf>

² <https://data.brent.gov.uk/download/2w7n8/bvc/2021%20Census%20-%20Qualifications%20-%20topic%20report%20-%2020040823%20-%20AV.pdf>

roof. As the Community Wellbeing Project developed it transitioned into a new larger location, presenting opportunities to further develop the service offer, including additional employment and skills support. The ambition for the CCIN Policy Prototype funding was to increase our understanding of local residents needs and support the development of tailored offers at the expanded services.

By undertaking the OBR framework, Brent Council has used the Cooperative Councils' Innovation Network's governance, values and principles to engage with residents, gain insights and co-produce prototype offers to enhance support for employment and skills opportunities.

The Framework:

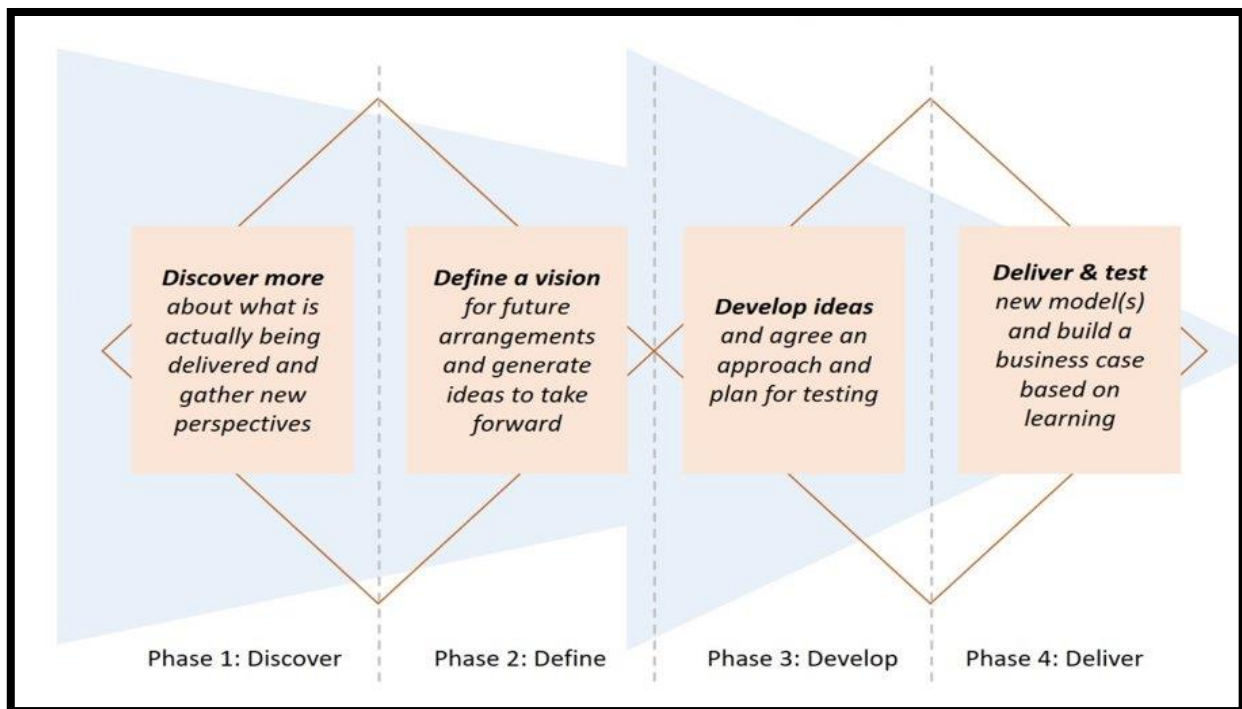
The framework adopted to conduct this review was an Outcomes Based Review (OBR) approach, which is a cross-council and cross-organisation review process that brings together diverse groups of stakeholders to develop new approaches and solutions to cross-cutting issues. The process enables stakeholders to collaborate using design-led methodologies across four phases: Discover, Define, Develop and Deliver.

The benefits of the framework include improvements to service redesign and delivery, enhanced collaboration and co-production with key stakeholders, and sustainable long-term benefits by tailoring outcomes to community needs.

Through the Employment and Skills OBR, we aimed to deliver the following during each phase:

- ❖ Discover: develop a detailed understanding of the current Employment and Skills landscape, with a focus on identifying cohorts and communities with earning disparities and understand their challenges to upskilling and accessing higher paid employment.
- ❖ Define: synthesising the outputs and findings from discovery work and collaborating with partners to shape our vision of upskilling and enabling residents to move into higher paid jobs.
- ❖ Develop: co-develop ideas and prototype new solutions in collaboration with key stakeholders, informed by resident insights on the challenges, gaps and access to opportunities.
- ❖ Deliver: testing and implementation of new solutions, including approaches, services and collaborative working.

By following this framework, we were able to develop a holistic understanding of barriers and explore the improvements required.



The Proposal:

Our Aims and Outcomes to Achieve:

- To develop a better understanding of the key barriers and support offers required to access employment and skills in Brent through an Outcomes Based Review model.
- To conduct enhanced stakeholder engagement and collaboration throughout the Outcomes Based Review with community engagement and hosting expert stakeholder workshops i.e. Visioning Day event to identify and develop improved opportunities.
- To enable residents to better support themselves through employment and continue to upskill to access opportunities.
- To align opportunities emerging from the OBR with ongoing work around the Cost-of-Living programme, by supporting residents to be more financially resilient and better equipped to deal with pressures relating to the Cost-of-Living crisis.

Cooperative Councils' Innovation Networks Values and Principles:

Our approach to the Employment and Skills OBR was guided by the CCIN Values and Principles, as outlined below:

Co-production: *we will develop systems that enable citizens to be equal partners in designing and commissioning public services and in determining the use of public resources.*



Co-production

This project supports Co-production by working with residents to understand their needs and enable them to be partners in designing appropriate solutions. When undertaking an OBR framework, community engagement is essential to gain insights and produce a co-productive product to meet community needs. During the OBR process, a series of ethnographic interviews and focus groups with residents were delivered, encouraging their participation and feedback throughout the discovery phase to ensure that prototype development was strongly informed by lived experience and resident needs.

Enterprise and Social Economy: *we will promote community-based approaches to economic development that focus on supporting the creation of jobs, social enterprises and other businesses and providing an environment for cooperative and mutual enterprises to thrive.*



Enterprise and
social economy

To promote a community-based approach throughout the OBR process and particularly at the Visioning Day event, we continuously collaborated with key community partners including representatives from Young Brent Foundation, DWP, Beam, Sufra and many more. This collaboration enabled further insights to map existing services, identify opportunities and co-design solutions, supporting thriving communities and enterprises.

Maximising Social Value: *we will support the development of a framework and criteria for social value, giving substance to the concept and supporting Councils with the tools to ensure better local social economic outcomes.*



Maximising
social value

The research and insights gathered throughout this OBR process will support the Council's wider approach to social value, ensuring that we maximise value and improve local socioeconomic outcomes. Insights will be shared to ensure that ongoing work to maximise social value is strongly informed by local need and resident experience.

Social Partnership: we will strengthen the cooperative partnership between citizens, communities, enterprises and Councils, based on a shared sense of responsibility for wellbeing and mutual benefit.



Social Partnership

This project framework has required strong and continuous engagement with internal and external stakeholders to gain insight and strengthen partnerships, demonstrating a shared responsibility to contribute towards improving access to employment and skills opportunities. Undertaking the OBR phases, stakeholder insights and contributions were vital to discovering and defining the problem, identifying opportunities and collaboratively developing and delivering opportunities to strengthen social partnership within the community.

New Models of Meeting Priority Needs: in exploring ways of meeting the priority needs of our communities we will encourage models, such as cooperatives and mutuals, which give greater influence and voice to staff and users in designing and commissioning public services and in determining the use of public resources.



New models of meeting priority needs

The Employment and Skills OBR process has tested out new approaches to co-designing public services alongside residents and key stakeholders. Throughout the OBR process, we worked alongside residents to ensure that we had a strong understanding of their lived experience, the barriers they face and the support services they felt they needed to get into work. Through the OBR Visioning Day, we co-produced prototypes alongside community partners, VCS organisations and staff from a wide range of Council and public services.

The Action:

❖ Discovery:

As part of discovery and define phases, we identified key workstreams to address:

- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Review and analysis of existing data to understand the problem and available information to determine the areas for improvement. With a pre-discovery understanding of Census data and disparity within Brent, this workstream focused on building and comparing this analysis with service data and publicly available datasets (Universal Credit claimants). This research and analysis demonstrated that Stonebridge ward in comparison to other Brent wards, had the poorest outcomes within London Borough of Brent.

- **Community Research and Engagement:** Engaging with residents, professionals, large employers and anchor institutions was essential to gain an in-depth understanding of the needs, barriers and improvement opportunities. We hosted ethnographic interviews and focus groups with residents, workshops with community service providers and anchor institutions in the borough. These insights provided a direct understanding from expert stakeholders and residents, highlighting barrier themes of lack of awareness of opportunities and support available to upskill and gain employments to suit their needs.
- **Horizon Scanning:** Reviewing the approaches, success and lessons learned from other local authorities on addressing residents' barriers and solutions in accessing employment and skills opportunities, was an essential part of this framework. We conducted independent research of existing frameworks, to ensure our understanding and consideration of opportunities.
- **Service Mapping:** An Employment and Skills-focused event was hosted in Stonebridge, which brought together representatives from a broad spectrum of internal council services and external voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners. This session enabled the identification and mapping of all relevant services operating in the area, while also highlighting common barriers faced by residents in accessing employment and skills support.

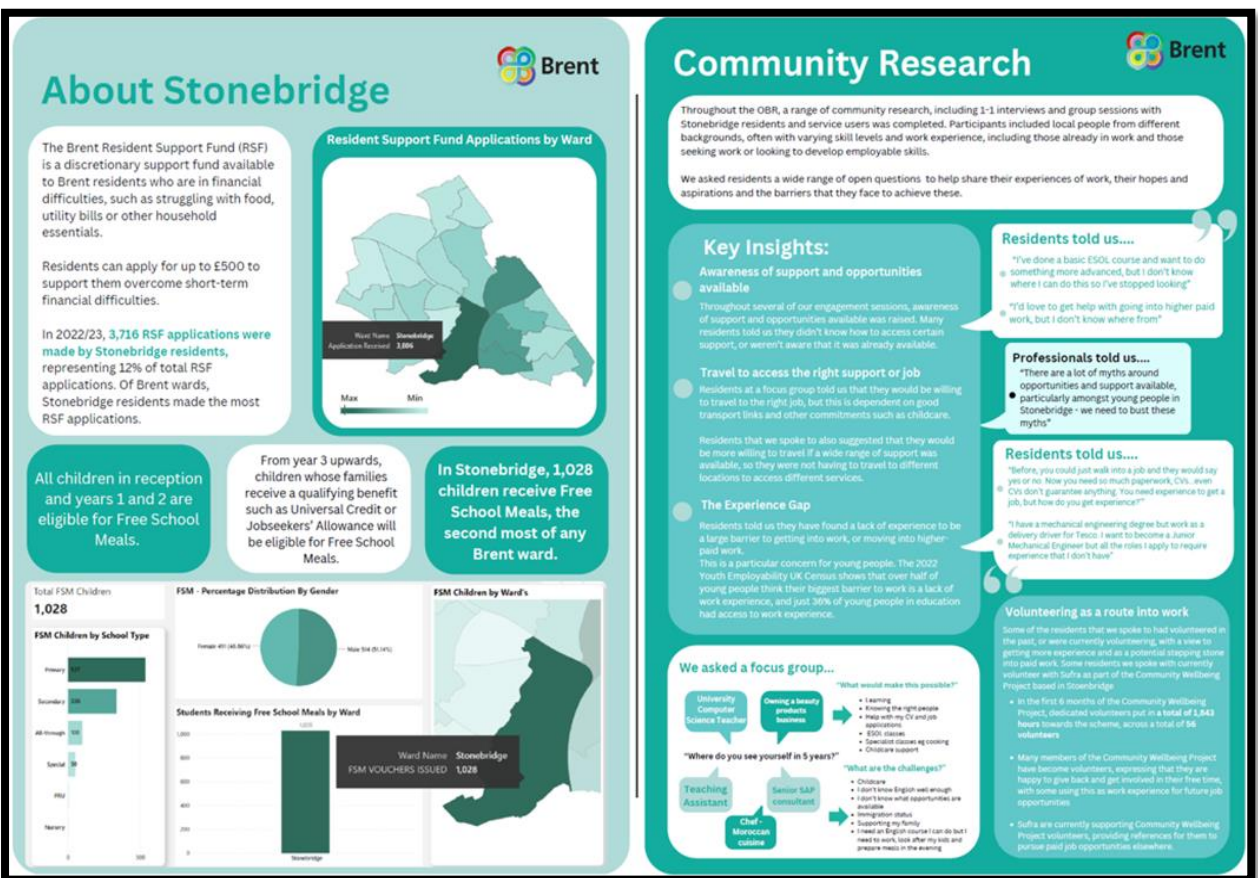
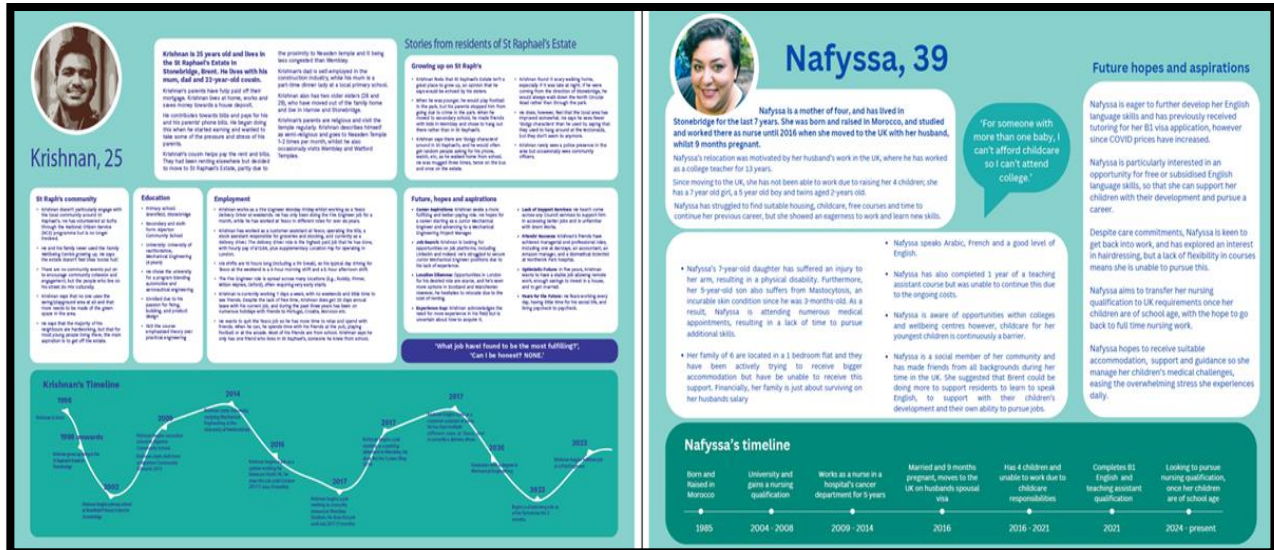
❖ **Define:**

Following the discovery phase presentation of insights into the barriers, needs and opportunities to improve employment and skills access within Stonebridge, the define phase was focused on collating these insights and identifying key themes for stakeholder discussion. From this phase key barriers identified included digital inclusion, the need for childcare provision, more opportunities for young people, language barriers and additional health and finance obstacles. We utilised these barriers as the core discussion for a larger Visioning Day event with internal and external stakeholders to develop ideation of proposed tools to overcome these barriers.

❖ **Develop:**

The OBR Visioning Day event was held on Tuesday 14th May at Brent Hub Community Enterprise Centre in Stonebridge, Brent. This three-hour event took place within the heart of the community and brought together a diverse group of 50 internal stakeholders and external partners. The session featured the presentation of a series of insight posters, which summarised key findings from the research conducted throughout the

OBR. These included ethnographic profiles of residents, insights specific to Stonebridge, horizon scanning of existing services and alternative Council offers, as well as an overview of the key barriers identified. Examples of anonymous resident profiles and insight posters are presented as follows:



Opportunities

Upcoming Community Wellbeing Service

A new Community Wellbeing Service, designed to promote independence for residents and enable more sustainable outcomes, is being developed at the New Millennium Day Centre, Roundwood. The offer will consist of various co-located services, including an expanded Community Wellbeing Project...

The current pilot project targets families with children, local to Stonebridge and Harlesden and in receipt of means tested benefits. The new model (the Community Wellbeing Service) will be expanded to be available to all Brent residents; not just families, but also single persons.

Monitoring of outcome indicators has also shown that at the end of their membership, members tend to feel more relaxed and optimistic about the future, more aware of welfare benefits and support services available to them and more financially resilient, amongst others.

This provides a strong foundation to improving their situation in other ways, including through longer-term employment outcomes.

Volunteers play a crucial role in the day-to-day operations of the pilot. Within its first six months 56 volunteers were engaged - logging 1,843 volunteer hours, with over 65% of volunteers living locally.

Volunteer roles range from supporting, organising the stock room, cooking alongside the chef in the kitchen and serving guests in the Community Shop. Many service users (or 'members') have become volunteers, expressing that they are happy to give back and get involved in their free time, with some using this as work experience for future job opportunities.

Learning from the pilot has identified a need and opportunities to develop and test stronger employment and skills support as part of the new offer.

Park Royal

Park Royal is the site of the largest business park in London.

One of London's primary industrial areas, Park Royal sits across the boroughs of Brent and Ealing, and is home to over 1,700 businesses that employ over 43,000 people across a range of sectors including: food manufacturing, logistics, film and prop houses, car repair and vehicle maintenance.

The Forge Park Royal is a business support, recruitment and upskilling service, connecting local job seekers with opportunities available at Park Royal.

Green Skills

The Brent Climate Emergency Strategy 2021-2030 commits to creating apprenticeship and training pathways into the green circular economy, such as green construction and retrofitting homes.

Commencing in November 2022, Brent Council partnered with the College of North West London to launch the Green Skills Centre. Based in Willesden, the hub ensures that current and future industry professionals gain up-to-date skills and qualifications sought by employers.

Flourishing Futures Partnership with Young Brent Foundation

A peer-led research project aspiring to transform the approach to youth employment in Brent and to guide young people towards a more prosperous future.

There will be opportunities to link in emerging prototypes and opportunities for young people with the next steps of the Flourishing Futures project.

Young People and Employment

Flourishing Futures

Since June 2022, the Young Brent Foundation, in partnership with Brent Council, have been working on a peer-led research piece into youth employment.

The Flourishing Futures peer research project is informed by conversations with young people across three of the largest estates in Brent, including Stonebridge.

This research has generated invaluable insight into the barriers that young people face in their journey into employment.

The project recruited young people living in Brent, including Stonebridge residents, to lead the research, ensuring that the research was owned by Brent young people.

The research covered a wide range of topics - from flexibility, mental health and financial status to discrimination based on ethnicity and gender - and found that all are important factors for young people.

Key Insights:

- Pupils from a Black heritage background in Brent achieve lower grades than most neighbouring boroughs, with 76% achieving grade 9-4 in GCSE English and Maths in 2021/22.
- Aspiration, as well as awareness of support mechanisms, can often be a significant barrier for young people to accessing education and employment.
- Census 2021 data shows that more than 1 in 3 of the young people living in Brent who are employed work in the retail or hospitality industries, by far the most common employing industry for this cohort. This was followed by public services (20%).
- Young people, especially those who are entering the workforce for the first time, may not be fully aware of their rights or wage laws applicable to them.
- 80% of young people interviewed were worried about barriers related to ethnicity. Research shows that 30% of young people had experienced some form of workplace discrimination, most commonly when engaging with customers or clients.
- Young people may also have false perceptions of the opportunities available to them. Young people engaged in Flourishing Futures research felt that opportunities at the Park Royal Business Estate were limited to low-paid, factory based jobs. In reality, there is a wide range of opportunities, including food manufacturing, logistics and film and prop houses.

Flourishing futures research shows...

When asked how often starting their own business had been discussed while in education, 47.4% of respondents said never.

When asked if anyone in education had ever spoken about where to access employment support, 61% of respondents said never.

Professionals said...

"A recurring theme when speaking to young people is the need for joined up employment support and information on what is available"

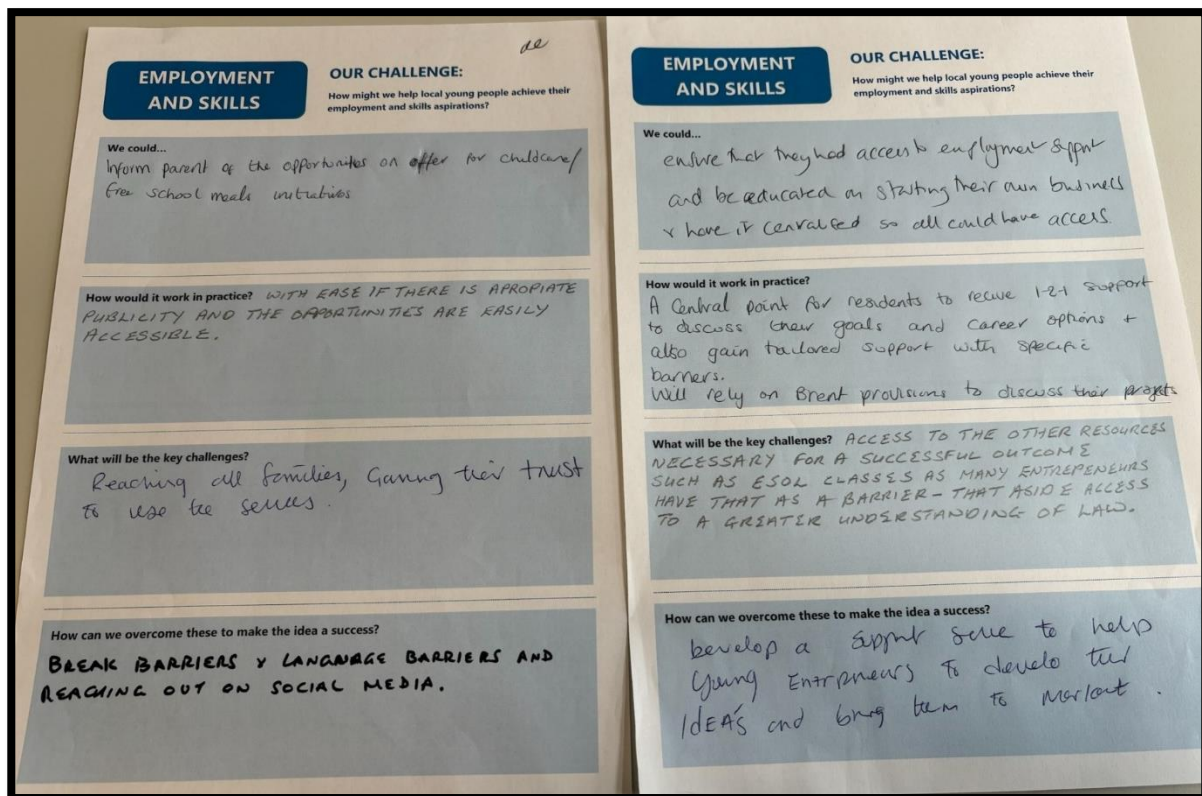
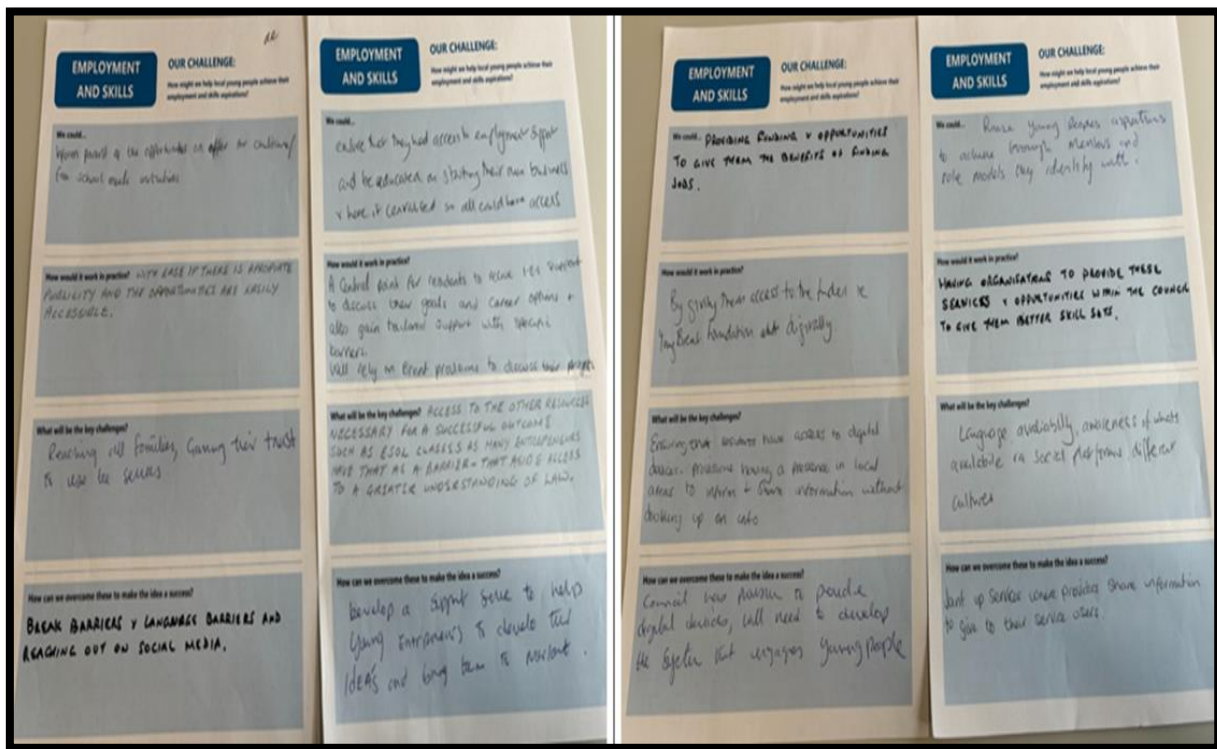
"Existing employment support models do not adequately lead to sustainable outcomes for young people experiencing long term unemployment"

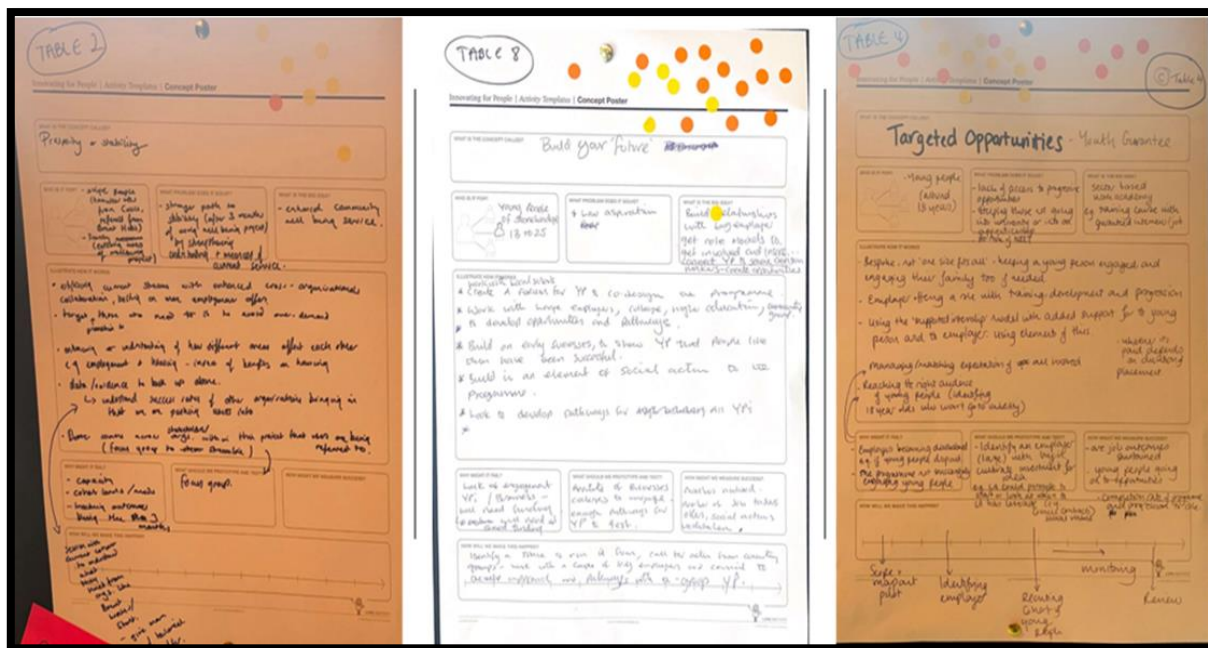
"Access to opportunities and work experience is time consuming for youth organisations and schools - what we hope for is a better facilitation within the borough of links between industries and businesses and youth organisations. There needs to be better local structures to support this"

Opportunities and next steps...

- As part of the next steps for this work, Young Brent Foundation will be working with Brent Council to develop Employment Ambassadors to lead on the delivery of workplace visits and other opportunities available for local young people.
- Take Your Own Initiative is a collaboration between Brent Council and two Brent based start-up incubators to provide affordable and flexible co-working, access to a range of support, for Brent start-ups and entrepreneurs. TZOI has a Black and Ethnicity Group, and a South Asian Women's Group.

This event was structured around three collaborative activities, designed to engage attendees in meaningful dialogue. Participants worked in groups to reflect and share insights from the research, identify potential solutions to the challenges faced by residents, and co-create concept posters outlining possible prototype interventions. This interactive format fostered a shared understanding of the issues and encouraged the development of innovative, community-informed ideas to support employment and skills outcomes in the borough. Summarising the outputs of this session, key prototype ideas presented included targeted opportunities for young people with public sector organisations i.e. NHS, increased awareness of childcare provisions and flexible employment, bespoke employment support within Stonebridge as part of the Community Wellbeing Project and improved ESOL offerings. Examples of the collaborative activities and innovative ideas are presented as follows:





❖ Deliver:

Following the Visioning Day, we utilised experts prototype ideas to implement and deliver opportunities for residents. The outputs of this OBR included:

- **Delivery of the Community Wellbeing Service (CWS) at New Horizons:**

After a successful pilot in Stonebridge during 2023-24, the Community Wellbeing Project was commissioned by the Council as an expanded, longer-term service – known as the Community Wellbeing Service (CWS) – embedded into the Council’s resident support offer. The service is delivered by Sufra NW London. To support the expansion of the Community Wellbeing Service (CWS) and to test and embed opportunities arising from the Employment and Skills OBR, a new site was identified and refurbished to meet the needs of the members, and the specification of the new service was tailored to enhance the employment support offer. The CWS re-located to the New Horizons Centre where it is co-located with other support services including family homelessness service, immigration and debt advice and employment services. This co-location model enhances accessibility and awareness of available support, fostering a more integrated approach to community wellbeing and strengthens the Council’s commitment to prosperity stability and thriving communities within Brent.

- **Collaboration with North West London Health and Social Care:**

Following a strategic review, attention was directed towards strengthening the partnership with the North West London (NWL) Health and Social Care Skills Academy. As a result, an Employment Programme model was finalised, with the

intention of piloting the full model by April and refining it based on outcomes and feedback. As part of the initial implementation phase of the NWL Health and Social Care Skills Academy and Brent Council Employment Programme, two key events were organised for residents in the Stonebridge ward. The first, a Preparation for Programme Day, was successfully delivered and aimed to inform prospective candidates about the structure, expectations, and requirements of the programme, as well as the roles of the hub and partner organisations. Nearly thirty eligible residents attended and expressed interest in progressing to the next stage. The second event, the Selection Day, was designed to assess candidates through a combination of skills assessments, value-based interview questions, and team scenario exercises. A structured scoring system was developed to evaluate readiness: a score of 60% indicated that the candidate required further support; 70% suggested the candidate was nearly ready; and 80% signified that the candidate was ready to proceed to NHS interviews. This approach aimed to ensure a fair and transparent assessment process while identifying tailored support needs for each participant. With a foundational establishment of relations and processes, this project transitioned to the responsibility of Brent Council's Employment team.

The Impact:

- The New Horizon Centre opened in January 2025 and has since upscaled to a full 5 day per week service aiming to provide enhanced support for residents with co-location of services.
- The Community Wellbeing Service membership length is now 6 months, extended from a previous 3 months, to further improve outcomes and work readiness for members accessing the service.
- The Council's education and employment services Brent Start and Brent Works support the scheme, with regular on-site presence, providing support in CV writing, access to courses and training opportunities and additional employment and skills advice.
- The Community Wellbeing Service offers a large number of volunteering opportunities and for some, the volunteering is used as work experience for future employment with Sufra as references.
- Refurbishment of the site included the creation of a new IT suite to support with digital skills and training, as well as a kitchen for hospitality training. Although this phase is still underway, it directly addresses key findings of the Employment and Skills OBR and once completed, it will improve opportunities for CWS users.

- The first cohort of service users are due to complete their 6-month membership soon. Ongoing measuring of the impact of the CWS, including work readiness of members, will be collected from surveys at the start and end of all memberships.

The Conclusion:

Reviewing the Outcomes Based Review framework identified throughout this report, this Employment and Skills OBR project provides valuable insight into the OBR framework and its applicability to service redesign and implementing improvements in community offers. The insights collected and assessed throughout the OBR, will contribute to an ongoing review and development of an Employment and Skills strategy. Reiterating our initial aims and objectives, the OBR framework has ensured an improved understanding of resident's experiences, enhanced support to address their support and resources to overcome challenges, ensuring alignment with the Community Wellbeing Project to encourage prosperity and stability within Brent.

Re-aligning with the Cooperative Councils' Innovation Network's values and principles, this Employment and Skills Outcomes Based Review delivered Co-production, Enterprise and Social Economy, Maximising Social Value, Social Partnership and New Models of Meeting Priority Needs. This demonstrates the Cooperative Councils' Innovation Networks support in defining their values and principles and showing 'cooperative difference' in this project.

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