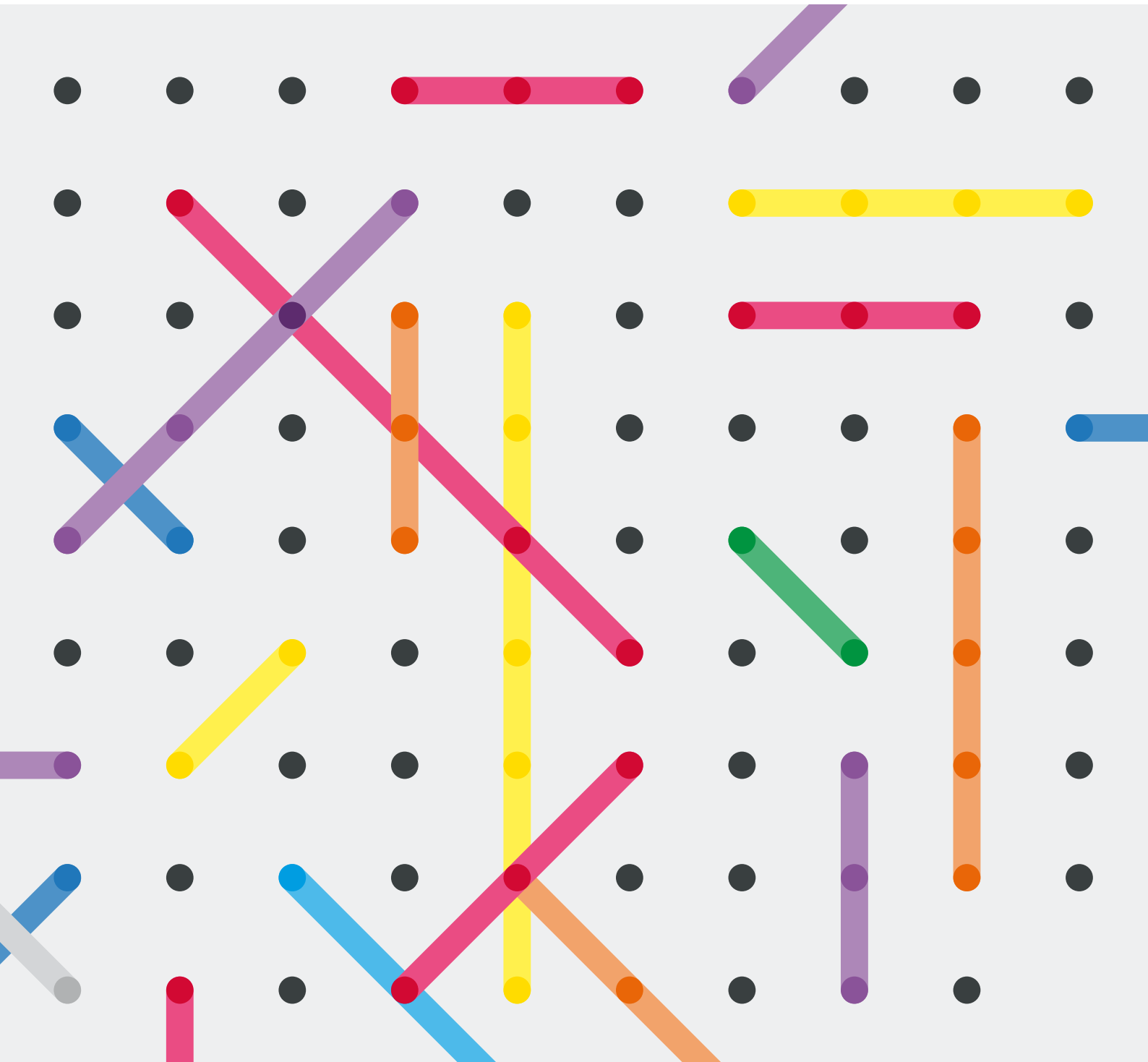


Community Engagement Team — Impact Report

2019–2024





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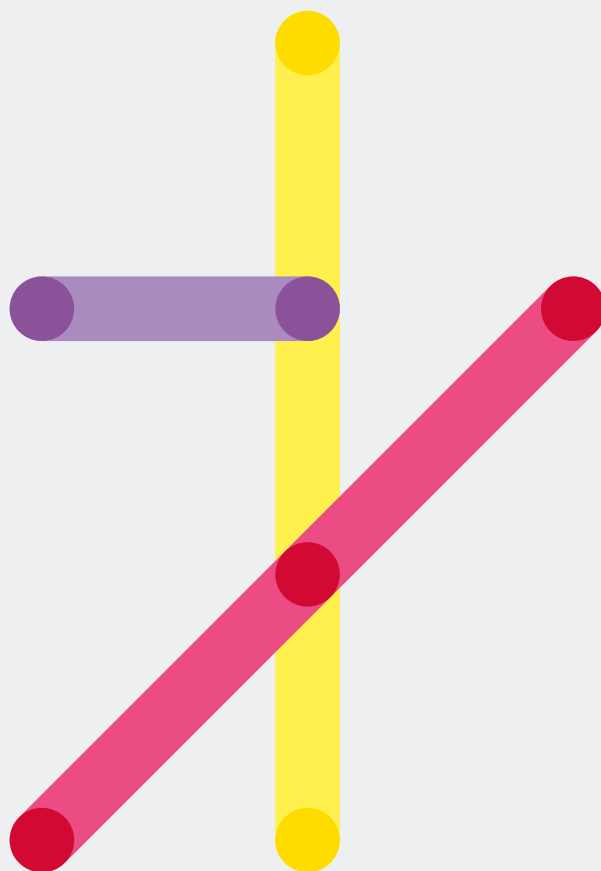
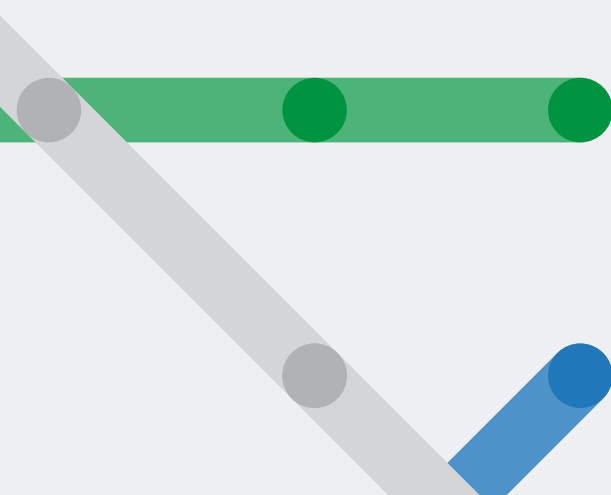
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About us

London is one of the most diverse, vibrant, and wealthy cities in the world. But we know people's experiences of living in the city are not equal. If we truly want to see everyone share in London's prosperity, communities must be at the heart of shaping the solutions to the most complex problems we face. Because the strength of London's communities is key to the city's success.

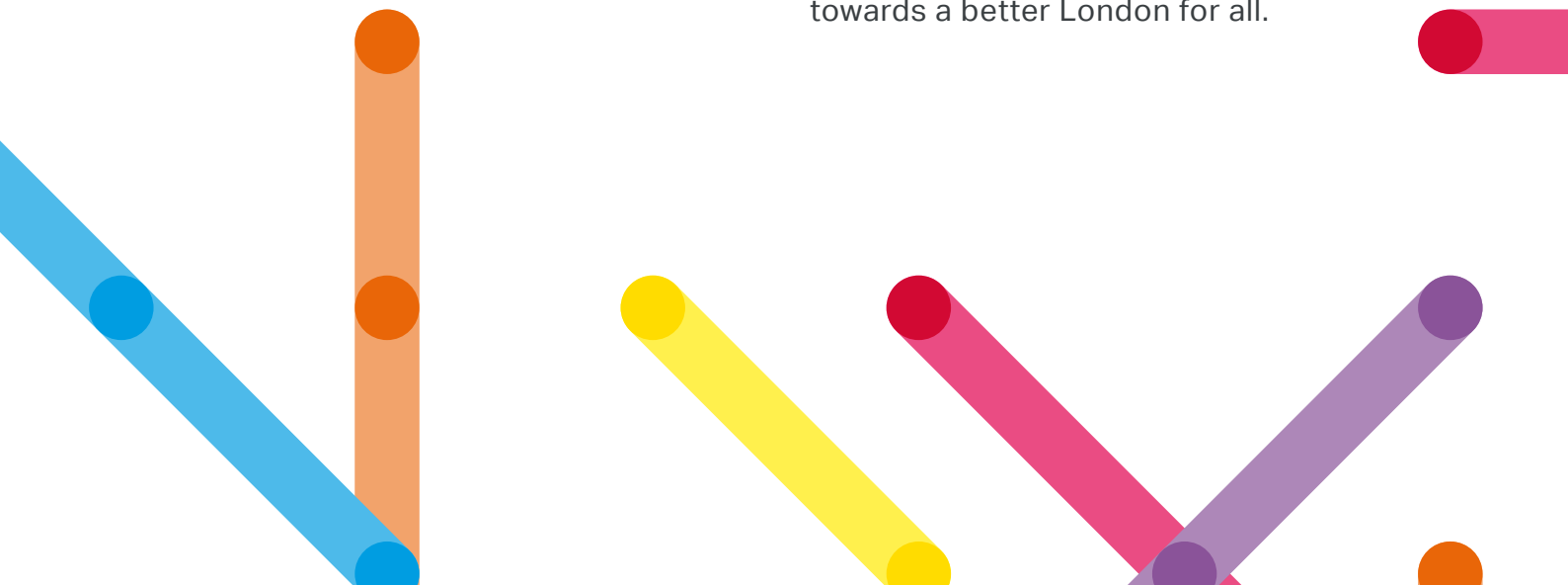
Everyday, incredible work is being led by Londoners from all backgrounds, faiths, and nationalities. Across neighbourhoods, schools, green spaces, libraries, and high streets, individuals and organisations are on the frontlines, improving the quality of life for their communities. These lived experiences, perspectives, and visions should form the foundation of policies and programmes that shape how Londoners experience their city — from housing, planning, and the environment

to policing, health, culture, business, and employment. This is how we create a city that truly works for everyone.

That is why the Greater London Authority's (GLA) Community Engagement Team mission is to **bridge the gap between London's diverse communities and City Hall.**

- We work to improve the **skills and infrastructure for engagement** within the GLA, but across the city.
- We work to ensure **all Londoners have the knowledge, voice and power to influence decisions** affecting them, their family and their community.
- We work to **create the right conditions for a stronger, better connected civil society** that supports a fairer city for all Londoners.

The story of our work includes removing barriers, reducing inequalities and supporting both London's communities and GLA staff to work collaboratively towards a better London for all.

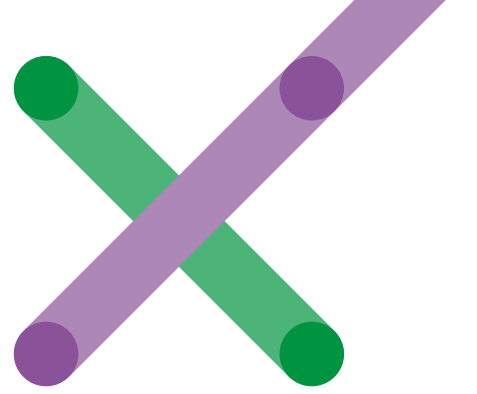




“

As an organisation dedicated to supporting London's Black and racially minoritised communities, we recognise the Greater London Authority's core mission in not only serving Londoners but centering their voices in their work. By focusing on strengthening systems and connecting people across the sector, our collaborative work with the GLA has placed us in a better position to provide long-term support to the organisations we work with and the communities they serve. ”

Yvonne Field OBE Hon FRIBA,
CEO & Founder, The Ubele Initiative CIC



Our approach

We focus on transforming policymaking, amplifying the influence of Londoners and strengthening civil society.

We achieve this by:

Increasing skills and capacity across the GLA to embed engagement into all work

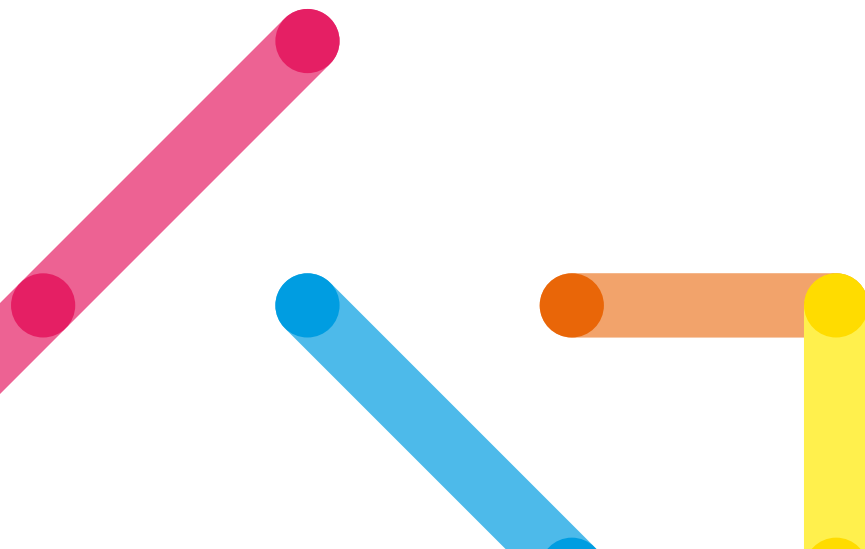
Empowering Londoners to participate in democratic processes and have a stake in decision-making

Growing and nurturing our connections to enable meaningful engagement across the city

These three pillars create the conditions that shift the diverse experiences of Londoners to the centre of policy development and service design. Our work recognises that engagement with communities facing the greatest barriers must be woven into the culture and practices of City Hall, local authorities, and civil society, to strengthen access to opportunities for all.

We know, despite the best intentions, too many voices go unheard because efforts to gather community perspectives do not reach them. This further marginalises those most in need of access to public services, undermines trust, increases apathy, widens inequalities, and weakens sense of belonging. Our work, therefore, focuses on creating environments of care that hear the stories we are less familiar with and increases connections and accountability to communities who have historically been overlooked.

Our method analyses the barriers that prevent Londoners' voices from being heard within policymaking and sources evidence to understand how those voices can be amplified and centred. The different approaches outlined in this report all work to establish the building blocks for sustainable best practice in engagement. The reflections and lessons housed in this report will then help us scale and focus the most effective interventions towards our core mission.



We work in line with our core values:



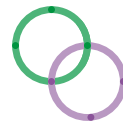
- 1 **Open, Honest and Trusting:** Trust is the foundation of strong and sustainable relationships. Through transparent processes, decision-making and evaluation we build trust between our partners while fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Sharing lessons and insights makes us more accountable to Londoners and lets others build upon our work. We value honest conversations about the opportunities and barriers our partners face and in turn trust them to work with us through complexity.



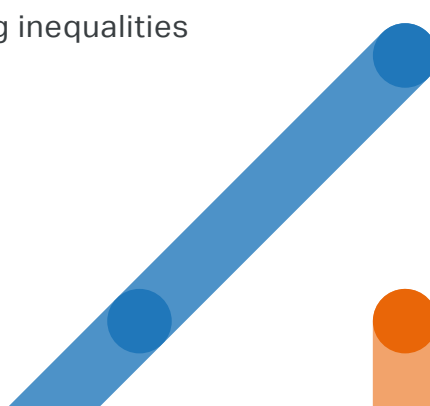
- 2 **Inclusive and Diverse:** Social justice is the driving force behind all our work. We recognise how different communities have been marginalised through systems of power, which is why we prioritise working with them to ensure their voices are enshrined in decision-making and that they are equipped with the political literacy needed to fully participate in civic and democratic life. By centring diverse voices and perspectives we step closer to eliminating inequalities within London.



- 3 **Respect and Power:** To achieve structural change, we must break from tradition. This means relinquishing the institutional power we hold and working with grassroots community partners to understand their challenges and strengthen their capacity so we can forge stronger relationships between London's communities and City Hall. We respect the contribution of all groups and perspectives and seek to address inequity in the distribution of resources and power.



- 4 **Collaborative:** The challenges facing Londoners are multiple and complex – and partnerships are essential for sustainable solutions. Every programme and policy impacting the lives of Londoners should be designed alongside them. We work collaboratively with colleagues to build internal engagement expertise, and we facilitate relationships between London's communities, local authorities and civil society to enable collective decision-making.



Impact by numbers

2019–2024

£3.2m



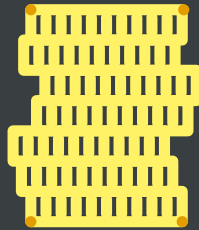
Total £ grants distributed

32



Worked with all 32 Boroughs
Funded 23 Boroughs

121



Total number of organisations to receive grants

115



Total number of leaders engaged in the Civic Futures Fellowship – Featured on [P36](#)

6.05m



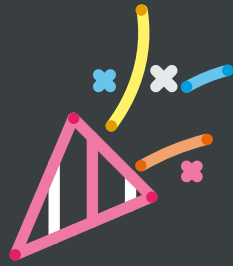
Total number of people reached through public awareness campaign on democratic process and Voter ID requirements

£3.08m



Total £ leveraged in from charitable/philanthropic funders

37,566



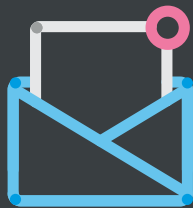
Number of participants in events

26



Number of internal GLA teams worked with

4,500+



subscribers to the Mayor of London Communities Newsletter

44,000



visits to the Democracy Hub ([registertovote.london](https://www.registertovote.london))



+ 190,000

Londoners reached through the Democratic Participation grants – phase two, feature on **P30**



26,132

people registered to vote during the GLA – led London Voter Registration Week 2023

1

The story of our work — Londoners at the heart of decision-making



To create a fairer city for all, we must begin by understanding how London's communities experience life in the capital. We know that access to opportunity, decent housing, good health, and quality education is not equally shared. Any efforts to address inequality must position the diverse perspectives of all communities, especially the voices that have been least heard, at the heart of decision-making. It is essential that we in City Hall, along with our borough partners and wider civil society, are equipped with the tools, resources, methodologies, and networks needed to meaningfully engage with London's communities. Only then can we honour the knowledge, experiences, and initiatives already underway, while building trust and forging stronger connections with those who have historically been underserved.

£20,000

Thirteen London Boroughs received GLA grants of up to £20,000 in Spring 2023 to help them better connect with local communities.

Supporting Borough Engagement Grants Programme

Thirteen London Boroughs received GLA grants of up to £20,000 in Spring 2023 to help them better connect with local communities, particularly those disproportionately affected by the long-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.

The Supporting Borough Engagement Grants programme, in partnership with London Councils, aimed to:

- identify opportunities to amplify the voices of the communities with the fewest opportunities to participate in London's recovery, because of structural exclusion
- foster a more equitable relationship between London's diverse communities and decision-makers
- support communities and grassroots organisations to participate fully in London's recovery, with a specific focus on intersectional experiences and perspectives
- embed community insight within London's strategic decision-making bodies, including the GLA and London Councils, informing their understanding of the aspirations and needs of London's communities.

Neighbourly Lab was commissioned to provide additional support involving workshops with grantees, troubleshooting emerging challenges, one-to-one sessions and project visits. Grantees described the fund as flexible, patient, with an openness to failure that resulted in learning and growth. They also valued an environment which encouraged peer support and working with communities to shape projects. [Read the full report here.](#)

Impact

Rebuilding trust with marginalised communities: Some councils focused on engaging specific communities to better understand and address their needs – these included Deaf and disabled communities, young people, and those seeking sanctuary. Overcoming mistrust felt by people who have historically been let down by council and wider public services requires dedicated effort. The flexibility of the grant enabled councils to spend time with residents and work in different ways, leading to deeper relationships and regaining of trust.

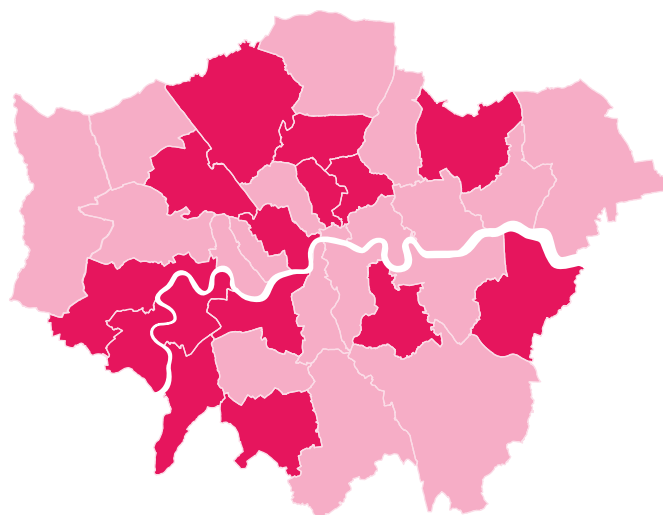
Distribution of grants across London boroughs:

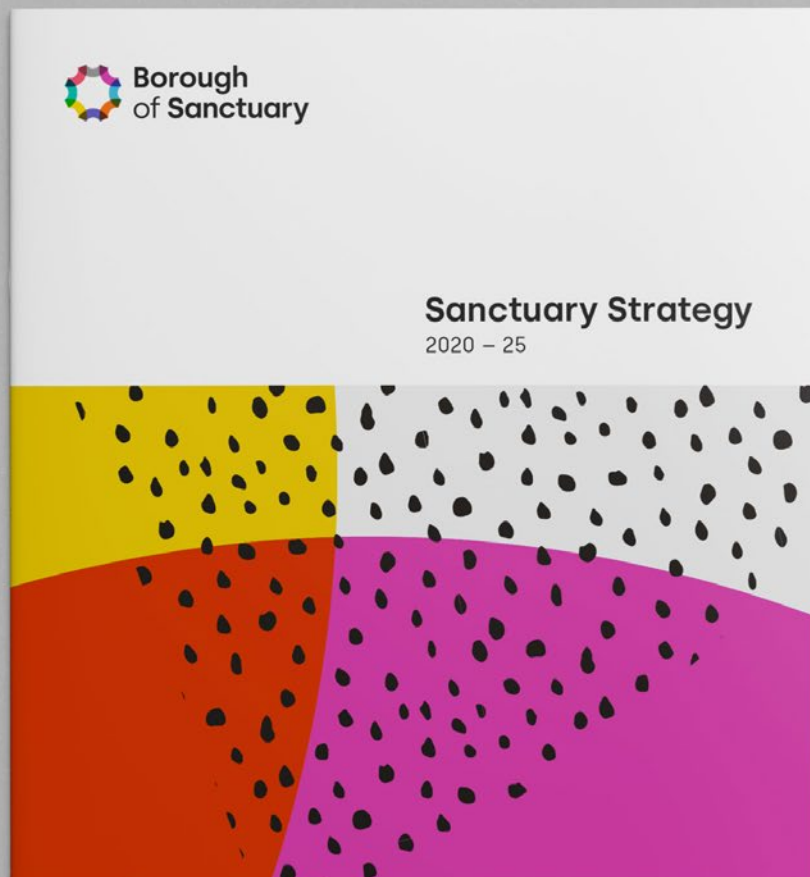
- Barnet, Bexley, Brent, Hackney, Haringey, Hounslow, Islington, Kingston, Lewisham, Redbridge, Richmond/Wandsworth, Sutton and Westminster.

Longer lasting connections forged:

Some projects created new spaces for residents to visit, meet people, explore their cultural heritage, and increase feelings of solidarity and belonging. These are all essential to strengthening community resilience and while not necessarily core objectives of the project, will have long-lasting impact and support more active and involved communities.

Legacy: Despite the relatively small grant amounts, the success of projects helped some grantees build a case for further funding to invest in communities. The ability to test approaches, develop new engagement skills and measure impact has also enabled grantees to generate buy-in from colleagues across their council, shifting mindsets towards the importance of innovative community engagement. By meaningfully involving and empowering residents in shaping and steering projects, councils have also encouraged more community involvement in neighbourhood activities and issues.





Case study:

Lewisham Council, Nothing About Us Without Us: Co-producing Our Sanctuary Strategy

Lewisham grantees worked with a group of people seeking sanctuary to co-design a project which identified three internal priority areas the borough should focus on to improve support for people seeking asylum. The sanctuary seekers then worked with colleagues across the council to develop these areas into internal projects that re-designed key services and processes including internships, a dedicated webpage, activities for children, and employment networking events.

The legacy of the project is A Welcome to Lewisham webpage translatable in nine languages, which provides social, legal and financial information for newly arrived sanctuary seekers in the borough. A new volunteering pathway was also established for sanctuary seekers, to support their employment prospects and wellbeing.



For me, this project has been the perfect example of inclusivity and the incredible power of diversity, a sanctuary seeker participating in the project. ”

London Engagement Collaborative

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was not felt equally. It exacerbated existing structural inequalities across income, health, education, employment and disrupted relationships and networks. The London Engagement Collaborative was launched in September 2022 to create a pan-London, cross-sector space exploring how statutory and civil society organisations worked together to respond during the crisis and how organisations can better centre the voices of London's communities to address the inequalities exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic.

Run by a partnership of the GLA's Community Engagement Team, Koreo, Migrants in Culture, and International Futures Forum, the collaborative members span different sectors and disciplines and include GLA policy-makers, local authority officers, funders, academics, civil society, faith and community practitioners.

The London Engagement Collaborative was established to:

- **centre community experience** and expertise in policy making and implementation
- **build strong relationships** and support collaborative working
- **share resources** and build collective learning.

The initiative offers space for members to share their ideas and experiences and develop collaborative solutions to the barriers to community participation through online and in-person workshops. The Good Ideas Fund is a way of encouraging experimentation among members, who can bid to the small pot of funding to:

- advance an existing project
- kickstart a new idea or methodology
- find solutions to persistent barriers to engagement.

The network aims to facilitate a space in which attendees have opportunities to meet others both formally and informally around sessions. There is a member's directory, a resource hub based on information shared in sessions and a monthly newsletter. Grassroots community organisations are invited to sessions to provide tangible examples of how they reach lesser heard communities. For example, Hopscotch Womens Group who spoke about their work with Afghan refugees in Islington; Carib Eats who shared their experiences of running a canteen and community space for their local Caribbean community, and Harlesden Community Forum who have involved local residents in planning processes.

Impact

The development of the network has led some participants to be emboldened in encouraging their organisations to **invest in and focus more on engagement** and experiment with different methods of engagement to **amplify seldom heard voices more consistently in their work.**

The Good Ideas Fund has given grantees the ability to **connect with local communities they weren't currently reaching**, like the London Borough of Southwark who identified mental health service users as a priority for engagement and used the fund to test a small-scale project related to co-production of a staff charter.

The intentional approach to creating an open space, where people feel empowered to ask questions and share success and failures, has translated into wider learning across the network towards **better engaging London's communities in service delivery.**



Internal Engagement Practice

One of the central aims of the Community Engagement Team is to support and encourage others within the GLA to develop their confidence, skills and expertise to engage with London's diverse communities successfully. We do this through the development of resources, activities and creation of networks to support staff and policy teams embed engagement in their work.



Peer to peer support

Engagement Working Group is an internal community of practice, comprising of GLA policy teams, which meets every two months to share experiences, challenges and opportunities. There are currently 93 people on the mailing list with around 12 people attending each session. Attendees have described how the group has helped them build connections with others outside of the GLA and the value of this to their work. For example, the Civil Society and Sport team connected with officers from Enfield Council to learn more about their youth steering group following the Enfield Hub presentation at the working group.

Action Learning training is delivered to a small group of GLA staff to enable them to come together in a challenging, but safe space for reflective practice through active listening, responsible questioning and peer support. One participant said **"It reminded me that I'm capable of finding solutions to problems and provided me with a different technique to do so. It also gave me the confidence to take my training forward and apply it to other communities I am a part of that are currently struggling for various reasons."**

Advice and support is offered to all GLA policy teams to support them to develop the right mechanisms for engaging Londoners. This might involve supporting teams to reach specific communities, support in designing the right engagement methodologies, facilitation of outreach sessions, community conversations or public briefings. We will work with each policy team to understand what the opportunity for engagement is and offer suggestions for pathways to participation.



Tools and Resources

We have also created a range of tools and resources to support GLA officers embed best practice in community engagement into their work.

Community Engagement Handbook

is a step-by-step guide on who, when and how to engage and the values which underpin it.

Community Insights Hub is a digital platform to help connect community perspectives to policy making through a range of media including pictures, videos, visual storytelling and podcasts.

Community Engagement Diagnostic Tool

aims to support teams identify where they are in their engagement journey and what support they may need to deepen their engagement with London's communities and improve their practice.

Peer research toolkit recognises the growing interest in utilising peer and participatory research methods in the policy-making process to better reflect and understand the needs of different Londoners. It aims to empower officers to confidently and effectively commission and support peer research in their programme and policy development.



Guidance and Research

Connecting Community Insights to Policy Guidance

aims to help policy and decision-makers better understand the process and the value of community-led insights.

Community Payments Guidance sets out how GLA teams can ensure appropriate remuneration is awarded to groups or individuals they engage with.

Mapping Community Engagement

Practice maps cross-sector engagement practice across London and explores the impact of this engagement on policy and decision-making.

One-to-one support is provided directly to policy teams to advise and support them to develop and deliver engagement activities.



Case Study:

Air Quality Team Support

Following the roll out of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) across London, we worked with the GLA's Air Quality Team to build on their community engagement practice. We focussed on how the team can strengthen relationships with community organisations.

Using the Community Engagement Diagnostic Tool, the Air Quality Team reviewed their current engagement work, their objectives and the resources they had to deliver. The Community Engagement Team then provided a paper of recommendations on how to implement effective engagement, following up with one-to-one sessions. The paper focused on key challenges and opportunities and offered options on how to take things forward. For example, how the team could build and sustain relationships with diverse communities, how to develop the skills and confidence in community engagement and how to use their budget effectively. The team also attended meetings with the Air Quality team contractors, to advise them on how to embed community engagement practice into the programme from inception and supported them to build relationships with community organisations.

Stakeholder mapping and engagement are now being embedded in objectives across the whole team with everyone encouraged to attend lunch and learns sessions hosted by the community engagement team.



One of my personal objectives is to improve the way our team delivers engagement and broaden and diversify the relationship we hold in the team. It was really helpful to have Community Engagement colleagues join the call with the supplier and talk through the individual parts of the proposal and have a discussion on the best way forward. The team has been very flexible in responding to the needs of our team. As we set objectives and formalise our business planning, we are keen to continue to check in regularly with them to identify opportunities to connect with communities and upskill our staff. ”

Air Quality Team Manager



Future of Participation Event Programme

The Future of Participation event programme took place in July 2023 and aimed to challenge how we think about and undertake community participation. The ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic compounded by the cost-of-living crisis meant far too many Londoners were still trying to navigate how to feed their families, pay their rent or cope with rising energy bills. The event aimed to address the challenge of how to engage people in policy and decision making in this challenging context.

The programme brought together community activists and organisations, academics, researchers, and policy makers over a week's programme of 14 events – five online and nine in-person. Delivered in partnership with a cross-sector steering group of civil society and grassroots organisations, the events were divided into three types of engagement:

- **Inspirational for all** – Broad appeal and a good way into the topic for policy and community thinkers.
- **Deep Dives** – Practical sessions to apply a concept to an individual or organisation's work.
- **Bite Size Thinking** – If short on time these sessions provided short bursts of big ideas.

Two community artists were commissioned to provide a creative response which culminated in live poetry and a visual exhibition and short film shared with audiences. A temporary WhatsApp group was created where participants could post their immediate thoughts and reflections during and after each session.

The programme was designed to offer different ways of engaging people such as through art or using Open Space technology. Three of the events were 'walk and talks' providing a way of bringing people together and sharing learning in a more informal setting. The idea of walk and talks as an engagement tool for policy makers' is now being tested further, funded by the London Engagement Collaborative Good Ideas Fund [\[see page 14\]](#).

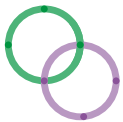
The 1,200 registrations demonstrated a strong desire across all sectors in London to improve engagement practice. Many of those who participated went on to join the London Engagement Collaborative.



Although the session topics were varied, three key cross cutting themes were identified and repeated throughout the session events:



- 1 **Trust** – Takes a while to build, the pace of which can be unknown at times, so for real change to happen you have to allow appropriate time, particularly when mistrust within certain communities is intergenerational.



- 2 **Relationships** – Building relationships requires both parties to take time and effort. A good relationship needs to consist of trust, transparency, respect, boundaries and reciprocity. Tensions can be avoided if everyone understands their motivations better.



- 3 **Barriers** – For some, physical spaces, be it buildings or rooms, can be off putting, feel unsafe and/or deny access. The lack of power sharing and lack of accountability by policymakers are often seen as a cause of tension with communities.

Impact

Around a quarter of attendees came from community engagement and civil society-based roles and valued the promotion of participatory models of engagement that focused on attracting a wider array of voices from their communities. **"I left the room wanting to do more and feeling motivated. I want to connect with people in a different way."** – event participant.

The dialogue created between Londoners, organisations who support them and the Mayor of London's policy teams created an environment which challenged power dynamics, an essential step in dismantling traditional perspectives of engagement, which have left the most marginalised communities overlooked.

The event meant participants explored questions around who and how we need to be to 'do' participation effectively, the role of storytelling and community insights in shaping policy, the importance of investing in relationships and levers for change. Reflections from participants showed this inspired ongoing work to establish more nuanced systems and practice among policy makers, local authorities and organisations working with communities.

Foundations of Engagement

For our work to be effective we must establish, grow and nurture relationships with different communities across London. Our Foundations of Engagement approach ensures that we build bridges across and connections with a range of groups so that:

- The GLA has a good understanding of the needs of different groups and their policy demands
- Communities are aware of and can participate in GLA policy making, programme delivery and support opportunities
- London's diverse communities are celebrated and valued, including through engagement with the Mayor and Deputy Mayors.

By investing in long-term relationships with communities, particularly groups experiencing the most acute structural inequalities, we demonstrate the value and importance of effective channels of communication between City Hall and Londoners. Within our team and with support from colleagues across the GLA we can:

- identify opportunities for engagement, including significant dates within the religious or cultural calendar
- update our contacts within different community groups on events, moments to feed into policy discussions and relevant funding opportunities
- keep up to date with the most current and important issues facing London's communities
- personally acknowledge moments of joy and offer support at times of crisis
- embed community participation in the planning of events and significant meetings
- share our learning from communities with teams across City Hall so as officers we are mindful of the current context communities are facing

Within this work it is important that we acknowledge the complexity of identity and belonging, which includes recognition that communities are within themselves wide and diverse. We recognise that there is shared experience for identity groupings which might be due to shared faith or cultural needs, experience of discrimination or exclusion or because of a shared history. Equally there is huge difference within these identity groups and all Londoners have unique experiences of belonging in the city.

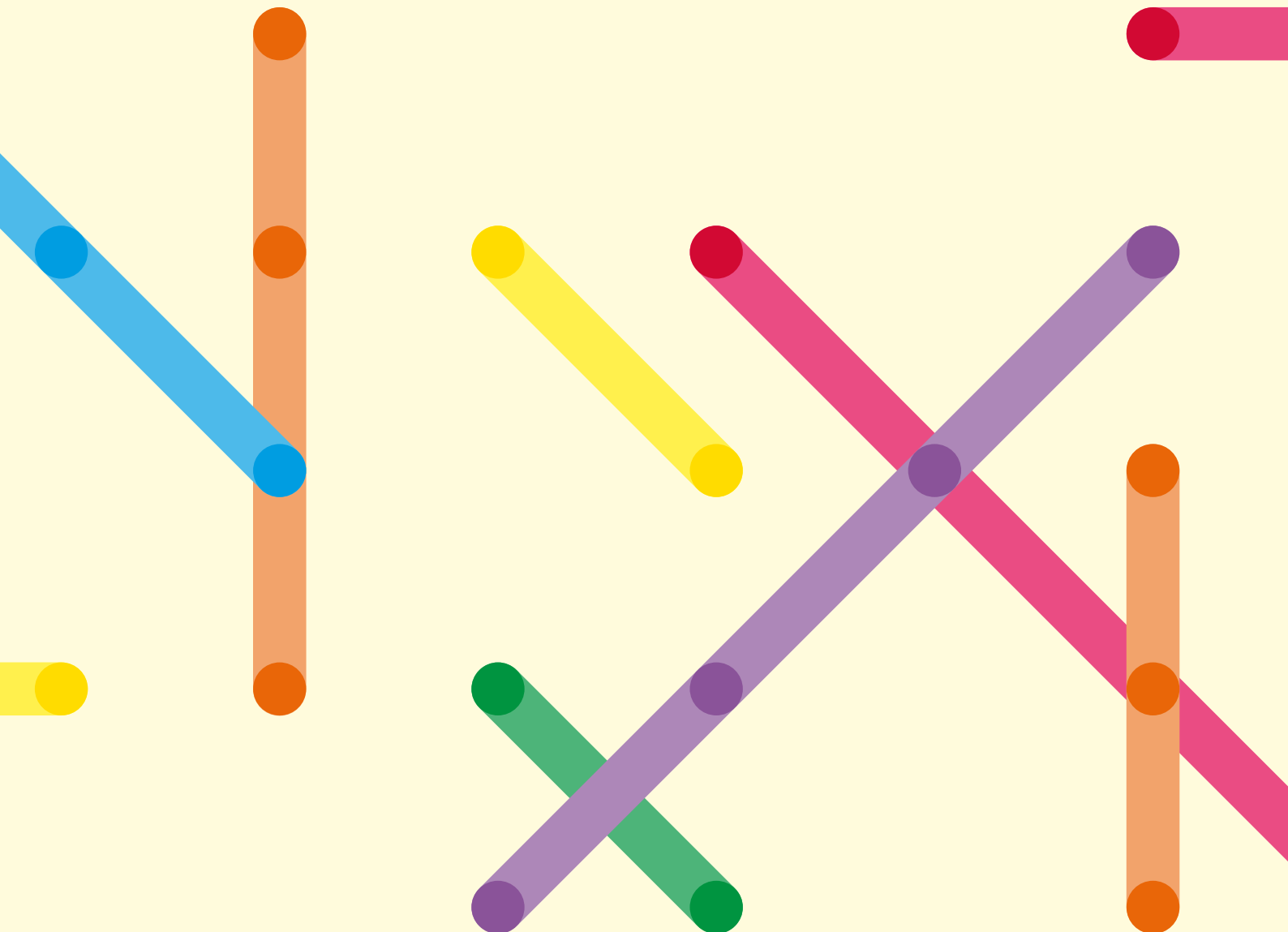
“

By investing in long-term relationships with communities, particularly groups experiencing the most acute structural inequalities, we demonstrate the value and importance of effective channels of communication between City Hall and Londoners. ”



2

The story of our work — strengthening civic and democratic participation



People are more likely to feel they belong in a city they've helped shape and support. Participation in civic and democratic life is dependent on access to information, trust in the democratic system and a belief that your voice really matters. Since 2019, the GLA Civic and Democratic Participation programme has played a crucial role in enabling individuals to actively participate in their communities; in decisions that affect them and their families; and, ultimately, in the future of London and the country.

London Voter Registration Week


London has one of the lowest voter registration rates in England according to [data](#) from the Electoral Commission, which shows 82% of Londoners are registered to vote, compared to 86% in the rest of England. Within London, the [Survey of Londoners](#) tells us that access to democracy is not equal.

70% 

of 16–24-year-old Londoners are registered to vote, compared with 96% of Londoners aged 65 and over.

82% 

of Londoners from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background are registered, compared to 95% of White British Londoners.

81% 

of non-UK born Londoners are registered, compared to 91% of UK-born Londoners. 88% of social renters and 81% of private renters are registered to vote, compared with 94% of homeowners - occupiers.

The annual London Voter Registration Week aims to use the GLA's statutory powers to promote social development to increase civic and democratic participation. London Voter Registration Week is completely impartial and not connected to any specific election, political party or politician, including the Mayor of London. It draws together a broad coalition of support from more than 200 civil society organisations and education institutions to encourage Londoners to register to vote – with a specific focus on those who are underrepresented on the electoral register.

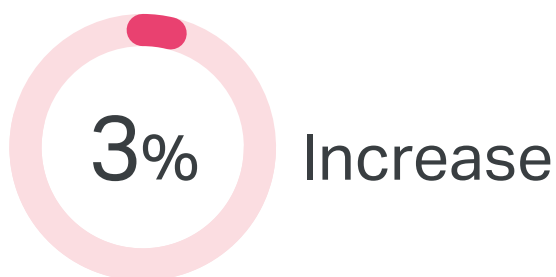
Delivered by a commissioned partner and supported by the London Voter Registration Strategic Partnership, the first London Voter Registration Week was held in 2019. It continues to work with communities who face barriers to democratic participation to design impactful resources, including political literacy resources, which are distributed during the week by our coalition both online and through virtual and in-person events.

All the resources, including in Easy Read, British Sign Language and community languages are available on the GLA Democracy Hub – [registertovote.london](https://www.registertovote.london)

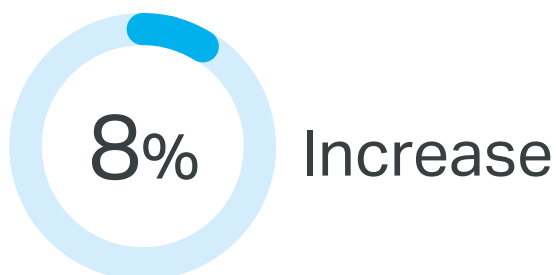
Impact

4m Londoners

Between 2020 and 2023, the annual London Voter Registration Week resources have **reached more than 4 million Londoners**.



During London Voter Registration Week 2023, **26,132 people registered to vote** in London, a 3% increase from the week before, compared to a decrease in registrations of 5% across the UK.



During London Voter Registration Week 2023, **6,681 young people registered to vote** in London, an 8% increase from the week before.

In its [report into the state of electoral registers](#), the Electoral Commission states:



In England, among different types of local authority area, the most notable change in completeness has been among London boroughs with an increase from 76% in 2018 to 82% in 2022. ””

Finding a voice: #NoVoteNoVoice



Voter registration campaigns are vital to helping everyone be part of the decision-making that impacts the environment and every individual in this society and beyond. We can be the change we want to see, starting with being registered to vote. ””

**Nathalie Combes, Mosaic
(LGBT+ Young Persons') Trust**



At Disability Action Haringey, we believe the annual pan-London activity is a crucial initiative for promoting inclusivity and ensuring that every voice, particularly those of Deaf and disabled individuals, is heard and that they are fully informed about civic and democratic processes. Only through a unified and impartial approach can we create a truly inclusive society, where everyone can actively engage in shaping the future of not just of our great city, but country. ””

**Phil Stevens, CEO,
Disability Action Haringey**

GLA Voter ID Campaign

The Elections Act 2022 brought about unprecedented changes to the way we vote. In response, the GLA launched a Voter ID public awareness campaign aimed to address the impact of these voting system changes and ensure:

- all eligible Londoners were aware that they need photo identification to be able to vote in person and could apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate, if they did not have an accepted form of photo Voter ID
- increased trust in the democratic system and equal access to civic and democratic rights to counter rising apathy in the electoral process.

Evidence from the Electoral Commission and insights from communities identified that certain people were less likely to have an accepted form of Voter ID. These include those already under-registered to vote including young Londoners, those from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background and those born outside the UK. In addition, further communities were disadvantaged:

- Deaf and disabled Londoners
- older Londoners
- LGBTQIA+ Londoners, especially trans and non-binary Londoners
- low-income Londoners

The Voter ID marketing and communications campaign was designed to raise awareness of the changes to the voting process particularly in communities most likely to be impacted. It was delivered through a mixed use of social media, London and community radio, mainstream and community press, advertising displays, TV broadcasters and internet search results.

Research commissioned by the GLA and conducted by YouGov into levels of awareness of the Voter ID requirement and ownership of accepted forms of photo ID found a **60-percentage point increase in awareness of the photo Voter ID requirement** between August 2022 and July 2024.

Impact



6.5m adults

London adults (aged 18+) were reached through the paid marketing and communication activity

1 in 6 Londoners

when polled, around 1 in 6 Londoners (15%) recalled seeing or hearing the GLA Voter ID campaign, across various workstreams and channels, with target audiences more likely to be reached:

- unregistered adults (24%)
- young people (28%)
- Black Londoners (24%)
- those on lower gross household incomes (20%)

7,500 Londoners

were engaged through 65 in-person events in collaboration with coalition partners across London, including in schools, places of worship, community festivals and workshops.

Access to democracy:

raising awareness of voting requirements



This is exactly the information that people here need to know, and it was expressed in a really clear and engaging way. ”

Worshipper at Barking Gurdwara



The interview was well received by our audience, and they got to find out why the Voter ID is now needed. It was a very informative interview with lots of questions regarding why it was important to vote. The spokesperson from the GLA was very engaging. ”

Spokesperson from The Beat London 103.6 FM

GLA Voter ID Grants Programme

The introduction of Voter ID significantly increased the risk of disenfranchisement among some of the most marginalised Londoners, including people from racially minoritised, migrant, Deaf and disabled and low-income communities. The grants programme recognised that those who experience the greatest barriers to civic and democratic participation are more likely to trust information provided by their own communities. This is why, as part of the wider Voter ID campaign, grants were open to organisations run by Londoners with experience of the barriers to democratic participation. They delivered impartial awareness raising activity and offered one to one support in trusted settings.

From January 2023 to February 2024, the Voter ID grants programme awarded **24 grants** of up to £50,000 to **18 organisations**. Combined, grantees **delivered more 1,050 events** and reached **more than 190,000 people in 30 London boroughs**. Grant activity consisted of a mix of online and in-person information sessions; leaflets and posters; one to one support to apply for accepted forms of photo ID to vote; social media campaigns; community events; dissemination of material to advice services; and partnerships with schools, councils and places of worship.

Impact

Surveys conducted by grantees showed:

+50% 

of people reached through the campaigns saw their **sense of belonging increase**

+80% 

saying their **readiness to vote and understanding of the democratic system improved**.

Through one-to-one support to Londoners by grantees:

3,031 people

either registered to vote or pledged to

521 applied

for accepted forms of photo Voter ID, including the free Voter Authority Certificates.

In depth: Training sessions for community groups

In Phase Two, grantees were supported to deliver their projects with a series of workshops on how to effectively deliver impartial civic and democratic participation campaigning. Led by the commissioned delivery partner, Shout Out UK, and members of the GLA Democratic Participation team, five sessions were provided over the course of the programme, alongside one to one support and mentoring.

As a result, 14 out of 15 grantees reported that, after delivering this project, they and/or their partner organisations were **more comfortable running civic and democratic participations activity and would be willing to include this type of activity in their ongoing work.** Based on the training delivered, the GLA developed a **toolkit** for civil society organisations operating in this space.

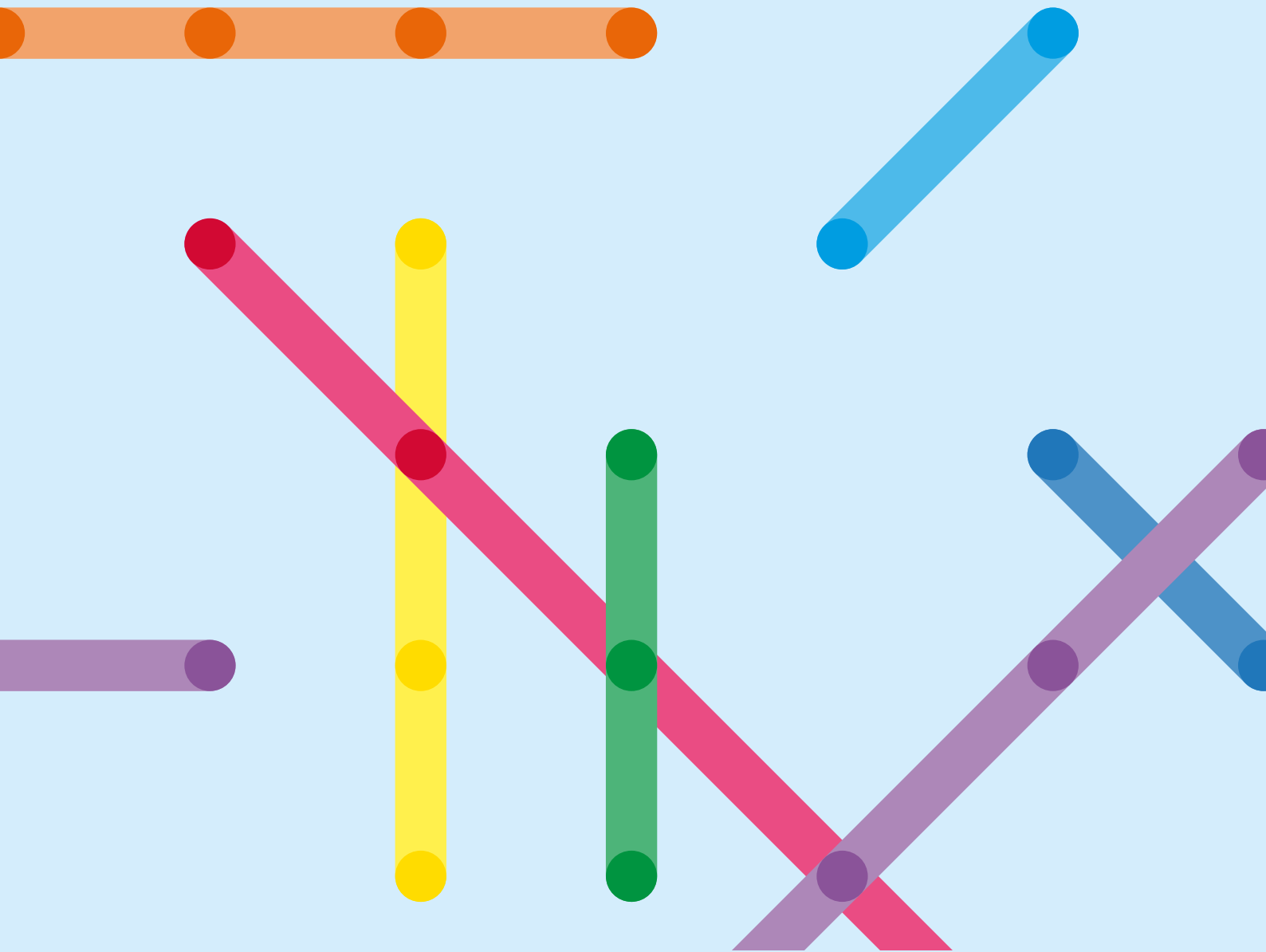
“

We found through our sessions that once people had discussed why and how to vote, and had become properly informed on the subject, everyone (that was eligible) wanted to register. They had not registered in the past not because they do not care, but because they had not been engaged, and were not informed about voting in the UK. Once they were engaged, they were very keen to contribute to this country through democratic participation. ”

Grantee, Roma Support Group

3

The story of our work — strengthening civil society



A strong civil society is essential to a city where everyone can thrive. That's why we invest in supporting civil society organisations working to dismantle the inequalities embedded in the systems that govern our society. A more connected London creates greater opportunities for collective problem-solving, equitable distribution of resources, and deeper engagement with communities that have been historically excluded from decision-making. By fostering stronger connections between boroughs, businesses, civil society, and City Hall, we can better support the diverse communities we all serve.



A more connected London means more opportunity for collective problem solving, equitable distribution of resources and greater reach into communities who have traditionally been excluded from decision-making. ”

Civil Society Roots Programme

Launched in 2019, the **Civil Society Roots Programme**, co-funded by the City Bridge Foundation, The National Lottery Community Fund and the GLA, looked to build the capacity of equity-led organisations – those led by and for communities impacted by structural inequality – strengthening their role in achieving a fairer London.

The programme explored:

- How individuals and groups seeking to tackle inequality best **work together**
- How frontline community organisations best address their **development and capacity needs**
- How activity to build strong communities in a local area can be **greater than the sum of its parts**
- The best way to **build solidarity** across different groups all working to tackle inequality.

The first two rounds were open to organisations across all London boroughs, while the most recent focused on 10 boroughs identified through an evidence review as underfunded, particularly for equity-led infrastructure organisations working with and for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, Disabled, LBTQI+, women and older people.

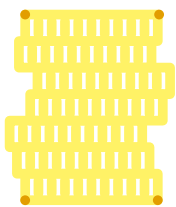
After three rounds of funding, Civil Society Roots has granted £1.92 million across 72 organisations, championing a model which works more collaboratively than a traditional funder-grantee relationship and nurturing stronger relationships between civil society, local authorities and the GLA. It has provided flexible funding alongside one-to-one mentoring and support towards strengthening organisations' ability to respond to and serve the increasing and ever-changing needs of our communities.

Impact

Londoners from underserved communities have benefited from stronger links between the local groups that support them and public bodies, **improving access to vital services** such as housing, mental health and employability support.

Increased awareness around the needs of people facing multiple barriers due to their intersecting identities has led to funded organisations being able to advocate for and provide **more bespoke and responsive service provision**.

Connections between different organisations with the same aims has helped to build a **stronger voice for the communities** they serve, resulting in increased funding and sustainability for these groups, which further bolsters the infrastructure supporting the most marginalised communities.



£1.92m

Now in its third round Civil Society Roots has granted £1.92 million across 72 organisations

Case study: Place at My Table - Where Rivers Meet Network

Place at My Table was formed during the height of the pandemic in 2020 to support people aged over 70 who experience a wide range of barriers to engagement. Round 3 of Civil Society Roots awarded the organisation just over £50,000 in 2022 to create a network of equity-led grassroots organisations in Sutton.

"The support that was given was outstanding. This ranged from networking with other grantees and funders as well as a wide range of workshops with excellent handouts and PowerPoint presentations. I had several one-to-ones with the GLA as well as the capacity-building support team. The opportunity to have both a grant and capacity-building support was new, but a model that is needed moving forward." Place at My Table grant recipient.

The resulting network of five organisations, led by Place at My Table, sought to better understand their organisational needs and those of Black and Asian older people to deliver improved services and advocate on issues their communities most care about.

Funding and support helped Place at My Table to develop a partnership agreement and framework, conduct a business procedure review, participate in training, and hold public consultations with their service users and communities.

After these foundations were established, they were able to co-create a development plan tailored to the collective needs of the network.

"Joining this network has been a game-changer. Before, whenever there was funding up for grabs, we'd all end up competing for the same small pot of money—so much time wasted. Now, we plan together, work together, and it's just so much more efficient. It really feels like we're all connected," Partner organisation.

The four main areas of impact for Place at My Table were:

- Strengthened network and collective influence in Sutton.
- Enhanced capacity through training and resource sharing.
- Long-term strategic foundation which they are now building on.
- Increased local knowledge for more effective responses to community needs.



Being part of a global group gives me a sense and feeling of belonging. [It is] good to get out to socialise with everyone, stops me being indoors feeling lonely and isolated. ”

Service user



Civic Futures Fellowship

The **Civic Futures Fellowship** engaged current or emerging leaders working in or with civil society. Originally organised as an advisory group in 2019, the programme evolved into an annual fellowship with a mission to produce groups of mobilised, confident and connected leaders prepared to deliver social change for London's diverse communities. In partnership with the GLA, the programme is facilitated by Koreo, Dark Matters and The Young Foundation.

Civic Futures starts by asking:

- How can we build shared wisdom in making the transition to a better future?
- How do we best bring together some of the amazing people active across London to learn from and support each other in building that future?

Each year up to 30 leaders are chosen to explore the skills, tools, methodologies, and relationships needed to build better futures for our capital. After three years a Fellowship Network of 115 leaders occupying significant roles in London across various sectors, systems and spaces has developed.

Participants are given space to reflect on their personal ambitions through one-to-one coaching, they form small groups to develop experimental approaches to issues that matter most to them, and they come together as a wider group to share knowledge and build a network of support into the future. The fellowship has distributed almost £100,000 in small grants to Fellows aimed at supporting innovation.



£100,00

The fellowship has distributed almost £100,000 in small grants to Fellows aimed at supporting innovation.

Impact

Personal and organisational

transformation: The fellowship has influenced the way people approach their work, particularly on the importance of equitable approaches to engagement. Fellows have applied their learning to their roles and organisations, influencing policy at a community and borough level paving the way for more effective reach and engagement in their communities.

Catalyst for longer term change:

The funding for collaborative projects has supported activities including community engagement through local news publications in Waltham Forest; community leadership in Redbridge; mental health provision for the voluntary sector in Barnet; and exploration into the role of artists in city governance and civil society infrastructure. These experimental activities have created the conditions for projects which have grown beyond the programme.

Establishing a network: One of the primary aims of the programme was to build stronger connections between different parts of civil society and to encourage collaboration. This has certainly been the case for many who have stayed connected with other changemakers providing a powerful opportunity to probe some of the greatest challenges facing communities across a range of perspectives, skills and expertise. Work is currently underway to formalise a Fellowship Network.

Case study: Civic Futures alumni Councillor Sara Conway, London Borough of Barnet

Councillor Sara Conway was an opposition councillor and chair of the community leadership and libraries committee in Barnet while on the second cohort of Civic Futures. A year later she became cabinet member for community safety and resident participation. She credits Civic Futures with helping her connect with others committed to community engagement. "In those terrible days, having gone through the worst of the pandemic, it was incredibly valuable to meet like-minded people. It was genuinely emotional sharing this experience."

Having worked in the community sector, which prompted her move into local politics, she reflected on how the programme reignited her enthusiasm for learning and foregrounded the need for grassroots organisations to have a support system of this nature. "It made me realise when working at a community level in small charities there isn't much professional development. This opened a door for me, so I subsequently applied and got onto the Fabian Womens Network's Political Education Programme and Next Generation LGA training course."

The network of fellows offered Cllr Conway the space to discuss and develop ideas, together with the seed funding provided to test projects and take this thinking back to her practice at the Council. "Civic Futures gave me the opportunity to develop something locally and to give back to local leaders. From watching the pain and difficulties in a space, then being on a programme sharing that with others, having one to one coaching and very practical learning is crucial for people working in the charity and community sector."

Following her time on the programme one of the first things Cllr Conway led on was the development and publication of the Council's community participation strategy **Together** which sought to put communities at the heart of everything the Council did. One pilot that flowed from this was a programme of community listening sessions with different communities invited to join senior Council leadership with an agenda and any outputs produced by residents. "We are now better equipped as a Council to reach out and connect with our communities in times of crisis and hope this means our resilience is stronger."

Over the past two years, the Council has run many initiatives centring community voice. These include the Barnet Citizens Assembly on climate change, which worked with residents to produce

recommendations for becoming a net zero council by 2030 and net zero borough by 2042 and established resident-led climate action groups. The borough has also co-produced a culture strategy to strengthen it's cultural offer making it more diverse and accessible for both residents and visitors.

“

While my instinct is to try to put community voice at the heart of policy development, Civic Futures gave me the knowledge, learning and confidence to move forward in this space. ”

Councillor Sara Conway



London Civic Strength Tool

The strength of our communities underpins our ability to withstand shocks, unite in times of crisis, and challenge inequity. However, the analytical tools which decision-makers rely on seldom use civic strength as a measure of impact. To address this gap, the **London Civic Strength Tool** was launched in 2021 to provide a resource that community organisations, funders and policymakers could use to identify the strength of communities across London's boroughs and wards. Unlike other measures of area characteristics, the framework was co-created with Londoners to include a robust definition of the elements that make strong communities. Through workshops, conversations and the Talk London survey, we engaged 700 people in identifying the three factors that are most likely to indicate the strength of the area:

- 1 **Relationships and social capital**
- 2 **Democratic engagement**
- 3 **Public and social infrastructure**

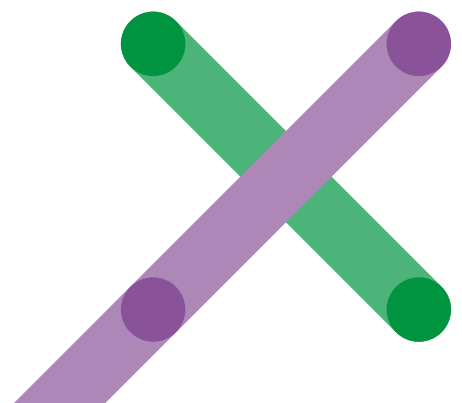
The resulting index relies on pre-existing datasets to measure borough- and ward-level indicators for each of the framework's three domains. The first iteration was produced by our commissioned partner, the Young Foundation, and following some

refinement in 2022 by WPI Economics, it has been used to develop new ways of thinking about policy, programme design and investment.

The GLA's **City Intelligence Unit** have also designed an interactive Data Explorer to make the tool more accessible for Londoners, allowing people to select their local areas and use the numbers provided through the collation of all the data sets to understand how their area performs on the different measures of civic strength.

We recognised that there are gaps in available data across the three domains, and to address this invested in initiatives like the Civic Data Innovation Challenge. This invited individuals and organisations to apply for grants of up to £10,000 to find new ways to measure community strength and help answer questions like:

- How can we measure the strength of relationships, social support or civic responsibility at a local / ward level?
- What proxies can we use to measure civic and community strength in London?
- How do we harness civic data standards to improve consistency across everything we measure in London?



Impact

The Tool has **supported local authorities and the GLA to develop new ways of thinking about policy, programme design and investment**, fulfilling its original goal of bringing fresh, community-centred perspectives to building stronger communities. The Tool underpinned Waltham Forest's development of a **15-Minute Neighbourhood approach** as the borough moved from an 'infrastructure'-led strategy to a 'belonging'-informed, resident centred approach. The Public Health Team in Hackney have also used the Tool **to support measurement of social connection** for their 2024 Hackney Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

The **CST's asset-based approach identifies strengths within the voluntary and community sector**, as seen in Southwark's **Community Investment Review** and Wandsworth's VCS needs analysis, and the way Camden Giving have leveraged its Democratic Participation domain to build on London's participation **infrastructure**.

Finally, the CST framework stands as **an important piece of thought leadership**, cited by The Young Foundation, London Funders, the Human Rights and Equalities Network, Impact on Urban Health, the International Public Policy Observatory, London Plus, and other high-profile organisations working to bridge the divide between civil society and policymakers. In their 2023 manifesto, The Cares Family network note the Tool is an important, **rare investment in information on social capital** which can underpin future civic data efforts.



The Tool has supported local authorities and the GLA to develop new ways of thinking about policy, programme design and investment, fulfilling its original goal of bringing fresh, community-centred perspectives to building stronger communities. ”

Case Study: Civic Partnership Programme and fund

In Spring 2023, the GLA's Planning and Regeneration Team were working on the development of the Civic Partnership Programme, a £12.9m grant fund designed to support place-based regeneration and deliver critical local infrastructure. The fund could only cover up to six project areas, so they wanted to target the spending carefully, despite knowing there were several areas across London in need of this kind of investment.

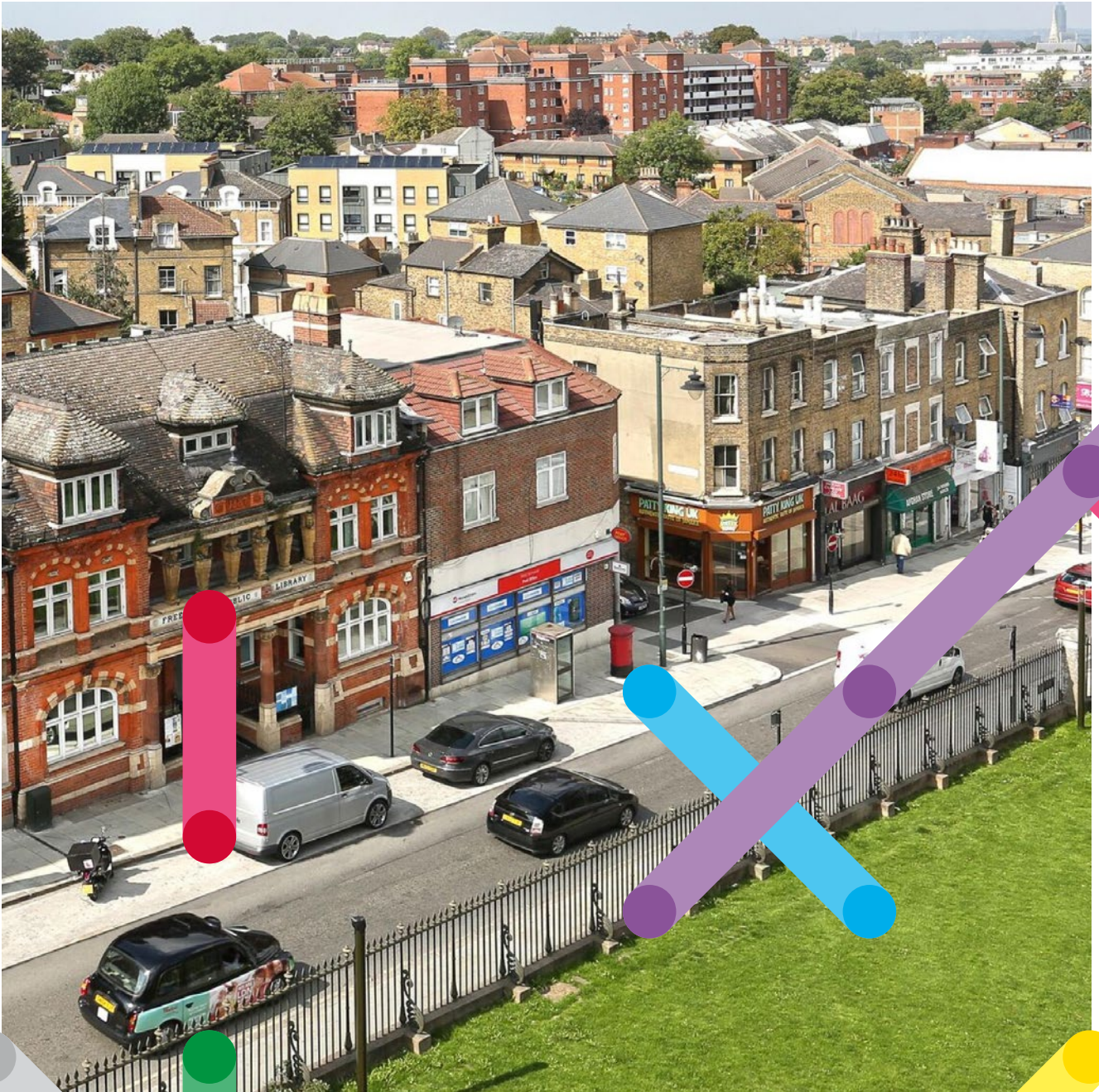
Traditionally, policy teams might defer to established datasets, such as the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, to identify areas in need of investment. However, the team needed to think differently if the fund was going to maximise impact. The Civic Strength Index provided a useful set of measures to draw from under the Physical and Social Infrastructure domain.

Using a Geographic Information System mapping tool developed by the GLA's City Intelligence Team, the Planning and Regeneration Team layered scores from the domain with those from other, more traditional indices. The result was a colourful map of areas of need across London, many of which were not picked up by deprivation scores alone.

The team said that the Civic Strength Tool had offered:



A really useful alternative way of thinking about community need, and helped them use funds in a way that would build civic strength, by longlisting eligible places that had gaps in public and social infrastructure. ”



Work with us

Help us remove barriers, reduce inequalities and strengthen engagement practice with London's diverse communities! Here's how you can connect and work with us:

Do you want to strengthen your policy and decision-making?

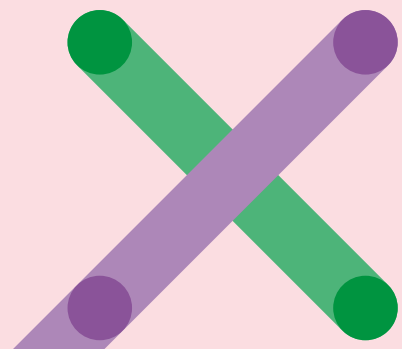
- If you're a colleague at the GLA, consider joining the **Engagement Working Group** to learn how you can embed community engagement into your practice or want to work with our team through your programme or policy design and delivery. Contact: community.engagement@london.gov.uk
- Strengthen your decision-making and evidence base by using our **Civic Strength Tool** – a knowledge tool that functions as a heatmap highlighting London's community strengths. Contact: rachel.dixon@london.gov.uk

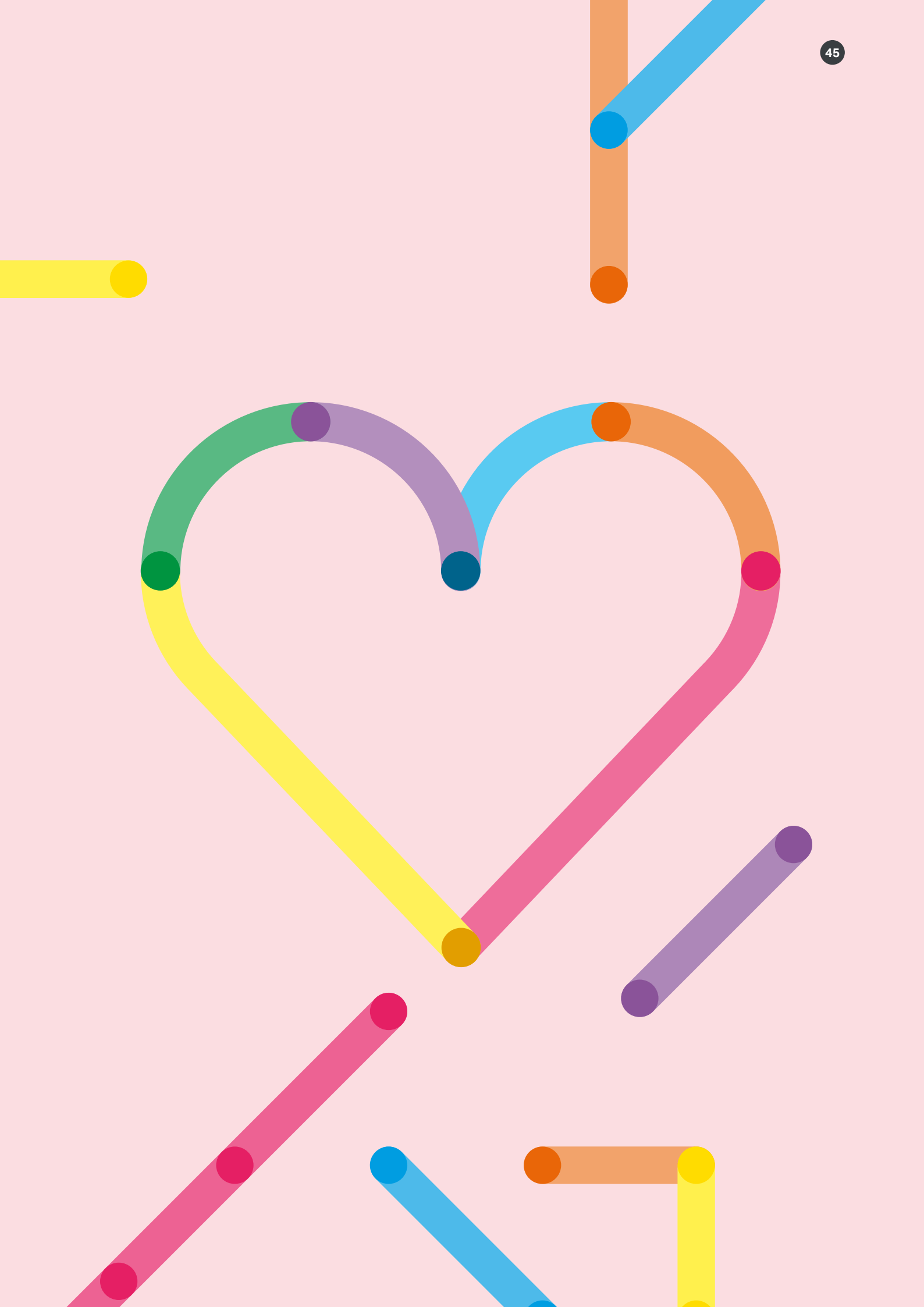
Are you interested in structural, systemic and social change?

- Join our monthly community of practice, the **London Engagement Collaborative**. A space to access resources and knowledge, build strong and supportive networks and centre community experience and expertise. Contact: lec@koreo.co

Are you part of, or working with, London's communities?

- Subscribe to our monthly **Mayor of London Communities newsletter** to receive updates on programmes and policies impacting Londoners, key findings from our work with communities, opportunities for professional development and funding, events and more. You can [sign up here](#).
- Make sure you've registered to vote, encourage others in your community to do the same, and learn more about political literacy via the GLA Democracy Hub: registertovote.london
Contact: democracy@london.gov.uk





Glossary

Asset-based: an approach that focuses on identifying and leveraging the strengths, resources, and capacities within a community rather than solely addressing its needs or deficits. This approach recognises that communities possess inherent assets, such as skills, knowledge, social networks, cultural heritage, and local institutions, which can be harnessed to drive positive change and development.

Civic engagement/ participation: the ability to participate in civic life e.g. starting and/ or signing petitions, participation in peaceful and legal protest, community organising, volunteering, etc.

Civic strength: the quality of public and social infrastructure supporting communities to build strong relationships and enable every community member to meaningfully engage in the issues that matter to them.

Civil society: voluntary and community associations, organisations and groups that operate independently of government and commercial sectors. Examples include non-governmental organisations, community groups, advocacy groups, charities, religious organisations, and grassroots movements.

Co-delivery: communities and the public sector working together in creative, innovative and collaborative ways, drawing on each other's experiences and expertise to enable positive outcomes for communities.

Co-design: brings together lived experience, lived expertise and professional experience to collaborate and learn from each other so that outcomes speak better to the communities that they are designed for.

Community: a group of people who share common interests, goals, or characteristics and interact with one another. They could be grouped by a common interest, identity, place, practice, circumstance or action. The concept of community often involves a sense of belonging, mutual support, shared connections and a shared purpose.

Community engagement: the process of actively involving individuals, groups, or organisations within a community in decision-making, problem-solving, or other activities that affect their lives or the wellbeing of the community. Examples include consultations, workshops, co-design, and participatory budgeting. The aim is to give individuals and communities a voice and foster inclusivity, empowerment, and ownership, ultimately leading to more responsive and sustainable outcomes.

Democracy: a system of government in which power is either held by elected representatives or in which citizens participation in political decision-making.

Democratic participation: the way in which people engage in the democratic process and decision-making such as registering to vote, voting, taking part in citizens assemblies, co-production of strategies etc.

Equity-led: an approach that prioritises fairness, justice, and impartiality in decision-making, resource allocation, and policy development. In an equity-led approach, the focus is on addressing systemic inequalities and disparities, in recognition that not all individuals or communities currently have equitable access to opportunities, resources, and outcomes, regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances.

Infrastructure organisation: a civil society organisation that provides support, resources, and services to other civil society groups. They often offer capacity-building activities, training, networking opportunities, technical expertise, funding, and other forms of support to help strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of civil society organisations working on various social, environmental, or community issues.

Partners: describes the individuals and organisations we work with to develop ideas and deliver our work.

Programme: a planned series of activities or events organised to achieve specific objectives or goals or a project or strategy within a defined timeframe often including evaluation or impact measurement to ensure effectiveness in achieving intended results.

Relational: the emphasis on fostering strong, collaborative relationships with various individuals, groups and organisations across London. This approach is fundamental to our mission of addressing the complex needs of communities in London through effective community involvement.

Social development: the process whereby societies improve the wellbeing, quality of life, and opportunities available to their members and communities. These initiatives aim to address social inequalities, promote social justice, and enhance the overall functioning, participation and cohesion of communities.

Social justice: the fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and rights within society, irrespective of individuals' characteristics such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, or other factors. This requires actively challenging and dismantling barriers to equality and advocating for policies, practices, and social structures that promote fairness, diversity, and respect.

Voluntary/community organisations: entities that operate independently of government control and are driven by a common mission to serve the public good or advance specific causes. They are typically equity-led, and established and managed by individuals or groups of volunteers who are passionate about addressing social, cultural, environmental, or humanitarian issues within their communities or society at large.

